PLAYBOY



























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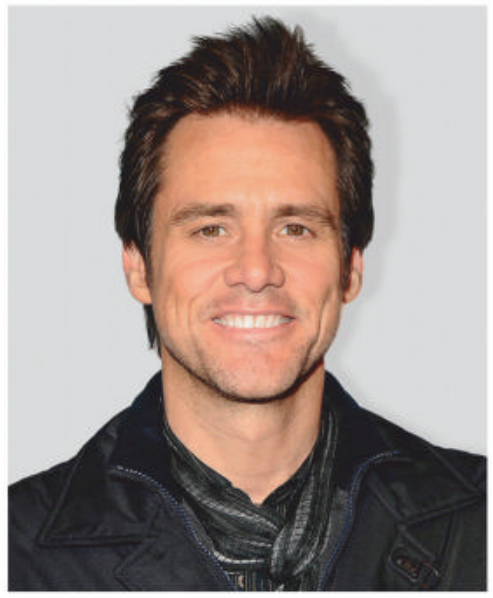
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JIM CARREY

t: @JimCarrey

For PLAYBOY's Equality Issue, our new contributing cartoonist chose to honor the late civil rights activist and public servant Elijah Cummings with an illustration titled *For Goodness Sake*. "I drew Elijah Cummings because he stood for love, fairness and truth. He embodied what is left of our endangered moral conscience," says the award-winning actor. Carrey will soon return to season two of *Kidding* and release his semi-autobiographical novel, *Memoirs and Misinformation*.



CHLOE & CHENELLE

i: @chloeandchenelle

"Diane Guerrero has such a strong voice in the community, and we wanted to capture that," say the Delgadillo sisters, our *20Q* stylists. "The Statue of Liberty served as our muse. We played with colors and shapes to make her feel and look powerful." Despite schedules overflowing with album covers, marketing campaigns and music videos, they're no strangers to our sets, having dressed a handful of our feature subjects this year, from BDSM role-players to King Princess.

JERRY SALTZ

i: @jerrysaltz

After moderating The Art of Sexuality, a Playboy-hosted art talk in New York City, the senior art critic for *New York* magazine signed on to interview revolutionary artist JR for us (*Portraits for the People*). "JR is a weapon of mass artistic destruction and retinal pleasure amid the corruption and crises of our Western democracy," says the Pulitzer Prize winner. His upcoming book *How to Be an Artist* sets out to convert his experience as a critic and lecturer into an accessible guide for the art novice.



SHAN BOODRAM

i: @shanboody

The pains of polyamory, bottom dysmorphia and thinking about sex 24/7: Boodram tackles these and other sexual quandaries with wit and empathy as this issue's guest Playboy Advisor. This isn't her first stint in the hot seat: In May, the certified sexologist and author of *The Game of Desire* hosted a live session of *Playboy Advisor* at the Playhouse, our pop-up magazine event, where she offered modern answers to questions from 1960s-era PLAYBOYS.





HEATHER HAZZAN

i: @heatherhazzan

Hazzan, a New York–based photographer and self-described lover of podcasts and outcasts, traveled to an Italian-style villa in the Los Angeles hills to photograph January 2020 Playmate Riley Ticotin (*New Year's Revolution*). "I wanted Riley to spearhead her own shoot and know that every person on the team had her back," Hazzan says. Her past subjects include music breakout Lizzo, presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren and PLAYBOY models Molly Constable and Christine Sofie Johansen.



JILL FILIPOVIC

t: @jillfilipovic

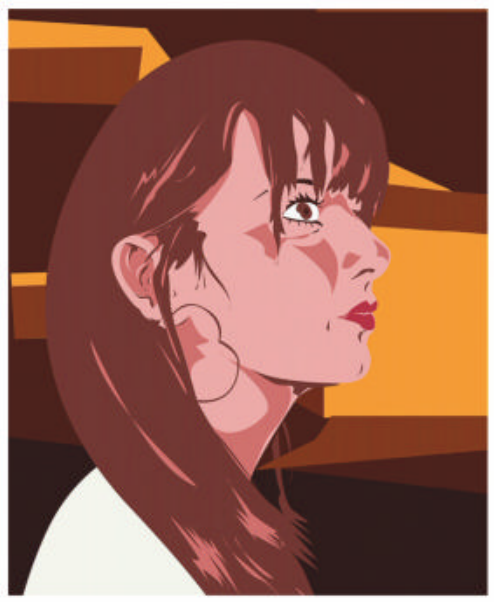
Filipovic brings her shared experience in a male-dominated industry to her *Playboy Interview* with legendary newswoman Christiane Amanpour. "Christiane opened up a world of possibilities for other women in journalism, showing us what we could be without pulling the ladder up behind her as she rose," notes the lawyer, political journalist and author of 2017's *The H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness*.

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ELIZABETH SUMAN

i: @elizabethsuman

The PLAYBOY senior editor focuses her editorial curation on the arts, whether articulated in spray paint or pubic hair. This issue, she introduces Hank Willis Thomas (*The Art of Attention),* inaugurates a new contributing cartoonist (Jim Carrey) and presents JR (*Portraits for the People).* "PLAYBOY has always been a platform for creatives to express themselves with freedom," she says. "I hope to continue that legacy."





FRANKLIN LEONARD

i: @franklinjleonard

How did this producer, professor and CEO of the Black List, Hollywood's prestige incubator for filmmakers and screenwriters, go about guest-editing *The Playboy Symposium* on women, sex and cinema? "My approach was simple," he says. "Pass the microphone to a woman who knows the subject better than I." The result is a seven-page study by Kate Hagen, the Black List's director of community.

CLAIRE LOMBARDO

t: @clairelombardo

Should we feel empathy for adulterers? Lombardo, an Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate and *New York Times* best-selling author (*The Most Fun We Ever Had*), weaves past and present in her search for an answer in *Francophile,* her PLAYBOY fiction debut. "Movement through fictional time gives us, as readers, the benefit of hindsight," she says. "It informs our understanding of characters, and their choices and circumstances, in a more three-dimensional way."



SPIROS HALARIS

i: @spiroshalaris

Halaris's art will be familiar to regular devourers of PLAYBOY fiction. His ethereal illustrations accompany recent reads *The Kiss, The Modern Era* and *We Are Not Here.* For his latest commission (*Francophile),* Halaris looked to Renaissance paintings and romantic European films. "The main character also influenced the mood of the series," he says. "I tried to evoke sensuality, nostalgia and domesticity to represent the trips between her past and her present."





NERYL WALKER

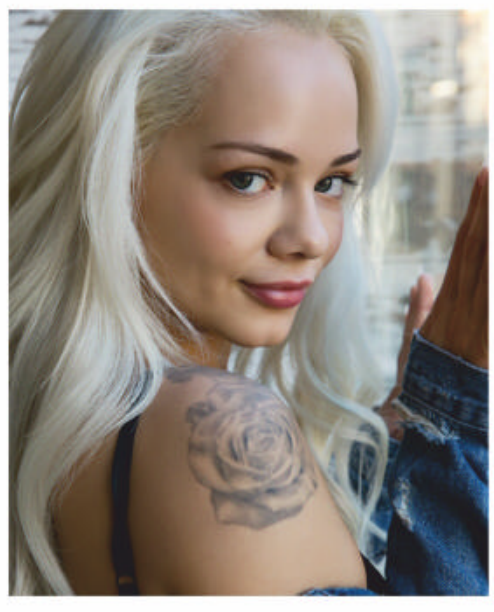
i: @nerylwalker

In fall 2018, PLAYBOY creative director Erica Loewy e-mailed Walker with a challenge: Reimagine LeRoy Neiman's famous Femlin, the first iteration of which appeared in our *Party Jokes* page in 1955. "I love the fact that PLAYBOY asked a woman to reinterpret the Femlin. It's about women owning their sexuality rather than being objectified by it," the Australian artist tells us. "The Femlin is fun, cheeky, sassy and confident." Walker's spritely creations have appeared in every issue since.

ELSA JEAN

i: @elsajeanofficial

In *Fandomination,* we meet adult performers who are converting freeloading fans into subscribers. One such subject, Elsa Jean, who has been active in the adult industry since 2014, can be found on many platforms, including PlayboyPlus.com. "We as sex workers are special enough to have the ability to express our sexuality with people worldwide," Jean says. "Sex is such a beautiful thing; I love that I can share it with people."



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PLAYBOY

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PLAYBOY
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A Letter

"Absolutely."

When we called Victoria Valentino, who first appeared in this magazine as a Playmate in September 1963, and asked if she would consider being in PLAYBOY again, at the age of 77, she didn't hesitate. Like us, she recognizes that in 2020, fighting for equality means providing actual visibility. An activist against sexual assault, Valentino knows firsthand how speaking truth to power—she courageously spoke out against Bill Cosby in 2014—is a societal force for good. She also knows that beauty has no boundaries.

In this, our Equality Issue, you'll meet people whose fearless work gives us hope that in this next decade we will all enjoy a more equitable society.

Christiane Amanpour, one of the most respected journalists of our time, is the subject of this issue's *Playboy Interview.* Currently the host of an eponymous news show on CNN and PBS, Amanpour has interviewed dozens of world leaders, from Angela Merkel to Yasir Arafat to Bill Clinton. Here she appears as interviewee, discussing how she reports on topics including gender inequality, climate-change denial and the current threats to our democracy. She also talks sex—and trust us, it's a page-turner.

For this issue's *Playboy Symposium,* we partnered with Franklin Leonard and Kate Hagen, the Black List's founder and director of community, respectively, to examine how well (if at all) Hollywood is keeping up with evolving attitudes on sex, sexuality and gender in cinematic representations. And across two music features, we profile the enigmatic country singer Orville Peck and the rising rap star Princess Nokia, two artists who are rethinking gender norms in their genres and in the industry at large.

For *A Very Millennial Scandal,* PLAYBOY features editor Anita Little interviewed former congresswoman Katie Hill in the days before and after her resignation. Hill, in the wake of a political scandal that brought about online debates on revenge porn and sexual misconduct at work, is forging ahead with a new mission to protect others from falling victim to internet-fueled sex shaming.

In *The Other Plan B,* gender studies professor Shira Tarrant argues that regressive reproductive-health laws represent a penalty against sex and that men benefit more from access to abortions than they realize. Here at PLAYBOY we are particularly proud to have supported the National Network of Abortion Funds last year, and in 2020 we will remain committed to advocacy in the face of state and federal legislative challenges.

As always, the arts will light the way, which is why it was paramount for us to present a group of artists who excel at creating spaces for conversation, connection and representation. Director and photographer Nadia Lee Cohen's cover pictorial, *Once a Playmate, Always a Playmate,* features the perpetually magnetic Valentino, Candace Collins Jordan, Reneé Tenison, Brande Roderick and Raquel Pomplun. Elsewhere, we examine how art fosters equality through Hank Willis Thomas's traveling retrospective (*The Art of Attention*), JR's career-defining mural in New York (*Portraits for the People*) and Sterling K. Brown's new production company in Los Angeles (*Sterling for All*). We are also thrilled to add Jim Carrey's incomparable imagination to our pages; the actor-artist contributes *For Goodness Sake,* a visual tribute to the late civil rights leader Elijah Cummings.

And finally, our first Playmates and Playmate photographers of the new decade: Riley Ticotin, shot by Heather Hazzan; Chasity Samone, shot by Adrienne Raquel; and Anita Pathammavong, shot by Ali Mitton. Together, these women demonstrate the importance and beauty of individuality. As Pathammavong writes, "I believe that empathy is the first step toward equality. We simply cannot let discrimination be indulged and privilege weaponized to divide people. We need to take the time to listen and educate instead of coming from a place of pain and anger."

So welcome to 2020. This is our vision for it.

From the Editors

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NATIONAL NETWORK OF
ABORTION FUNDS

EVERYONE LOVES SOMEONE

WHO HAD AN ABORTION.

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Behind the Lens

Nadia Lee Cohen, the mastermind behind both this issue's nostalgic cover and the ad campaign for Playboy's new fragrance, Make the Cover (coming March 2020), creates work with the instinct of a storyteller. That may explain why the British artist gravitates toward eccentric and striking characters who can effortlessly weave a narrative into her cinematic portraits. For the Equality Issue's cover story, *Once a Playmate, Always a Playmate,* Cohen used her lens to "focus a spotlight on age and photograph something I consider to be underrepresented in popular culture," she tells us. Cohen invited five Playmates across six decades—1963 through 2012—to help bring her vision to life. "I wanted to celebrate the original Playmates who helped shape and pioneer the brand."



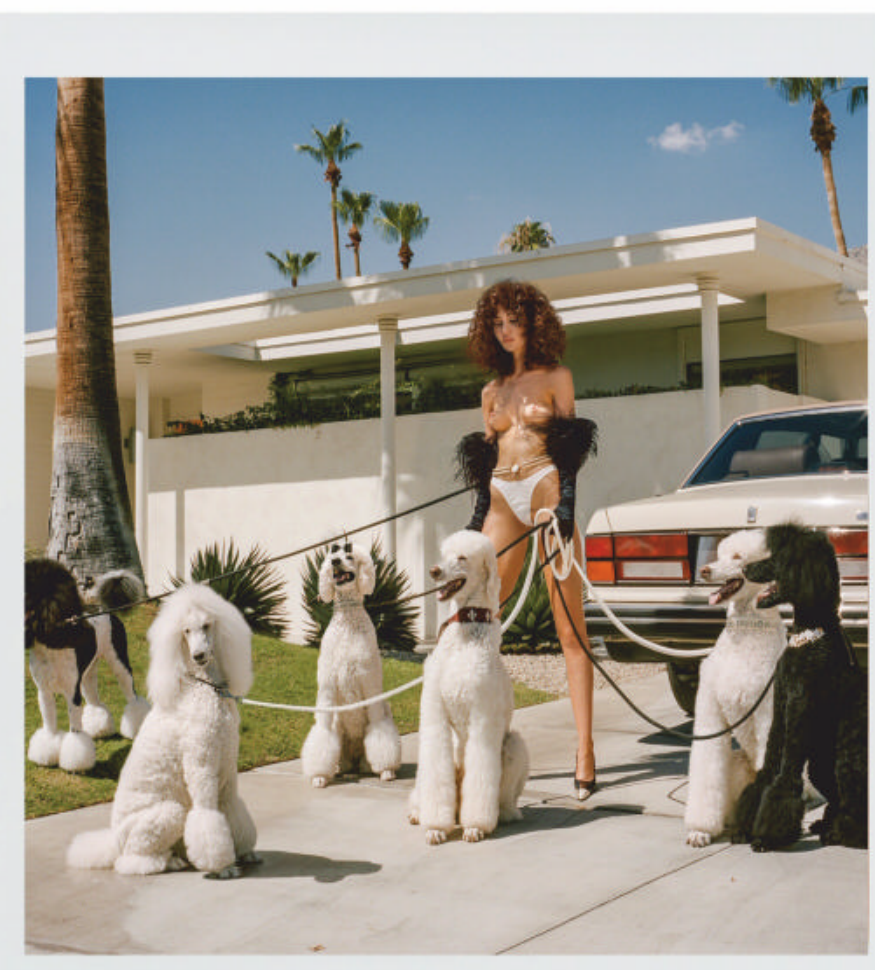




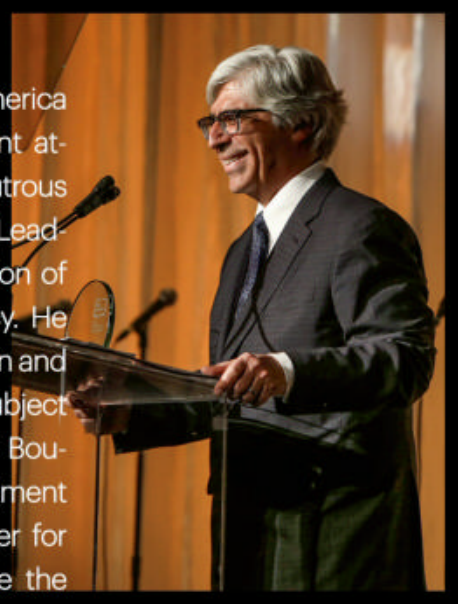








Playboy's Freedom Fighters



In November, PEN America honored First Amendment attorney Theodore J. Boutrous Jr. with its Distinguished Leadership Award in recognition of his free speech advocacy. He has worked with comedian and 2018 *Playboy Interview* subject Kathy Griffin, who called Boutrous after the Department of Justice investigated her for conspiracy to assassinate the president; reporter Jim Acosta, who refused to yield his questioning of Trump; and PLAYBOY White House correspondent Brian Karem, whose press pass was revoked by Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham without cause. In August, Boutrous successfully sued the White House, arguing Karem's suspension violated the First and Fifth Amendments. We congratulate Boutrous on his award.



The Art Outsiders

"Sometimes outsiders make the most powerful insiders," says senior editor Elizabeth Suman, who united French "wallpaper artist" JR and *New York* magazine senior art critic Jerry Saltz for an in-depth conversation in our photo feature, *Portraits for the People*. Forgoing a traditional interview for a private tour of JR's exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, the two men bonded over their unconventional approaches to their crafts. "JR didn't go to art school and is becoming one of the most recognizable artists in the world," says Suman. "Jerry was a truck driver until he was 41, and recently won a Pulitzer. Each, in his own way, is bringing art to a new demographic and challenging what the art community could, and should, look like." The show's centerpiece, *The Chronicles of New York City*, features 1,128 New Yorkers displayed across 32 feet of museum real estate. The mural becomes even more impactful when viewers realize it's connected to an AR app, JR:murals, which features audio clips of each subject. Turn to page 118 to download the app and hear the PLAYBOY pages tell their story.

Giddy Up

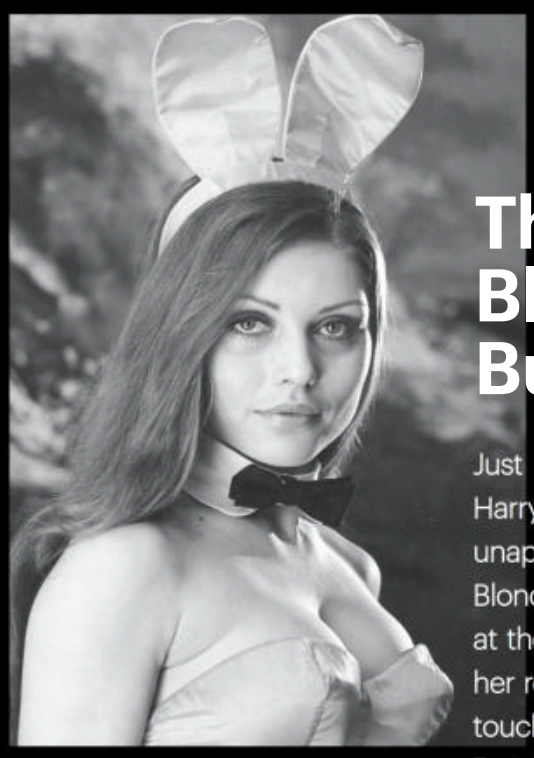


For this edition of *Man in His Domain*, Marissa Moss attempts to capture just how captivating Orville Peck, the elusive cowboy, truly is. To further explore the masked musician's origins, Simon Hanselmann, creator of last issue's *Megg's Pleasure*, stepped in to illustrate an original comic (right). Visit Playboy.com to see more.

Remembering Stephanie Morris

Stephanie Morris, a talented photo editor who spent nearly 30 years working for PLAYBOY, passed away this fall. "I don't think Stephanie knew how good she was at her job," reflects Marilyn Grabowski, another former PLAYBOY photo editor. "We had a great team, and a lot of credit goes to Stephanie."





The Blond(ie) Bunny

Just a few years before Debbie Harry got her big break as the unapologetic frontwoman of Blondie, she did a stint as a Bunny at the New York Playboy Club. In her recent memoir, *Face It*, Harry touches on everything from Bunny-hood to bankruptcy to the band's breakup. To read more about her experience wearing the ears and tail, check out *Diamond Days* (page 209).

fandom nation

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CHARLOTTE RUTHERFORD

Sign up. Log in. Cash out. Repeat. Why so many people are buying into free porn's biggest competitors

BY **LINA ABASCAL**

When Elsa Jean flounces into the studio in full hair and makeup, one has to wonder why she's here. Every moment she spends on set, she's losing money. "I make about $30,000 to $40,000 a month from my OnlyFans account," says Jean (pictured), whose platinum blonde waves and wide eyes leave no question as to which animated phenomenon inspired her stage name. "I've cut my studio work way back because I really don't need to do it anymore. It takes me 30 minutes to film something. On set, it takes hours."

Although only 23 years old, Jean is a five-year veteran of the adult business—a porn superstar (1.5 million Instagram followers and counting) and now a proselytizer for OnlyFans, a membership-based social platform that hosts the content of more than 100,000 creators for more than 8 million subscribers (or "fans"). Launched in 2016, OnlyFans, while not exclusively for adult performers, has disrupted the porn industry by making it easier for sex workers to generate income off their content, shifting them away from major studios for casting, production, distribution and payment. Increasingly influential in a time when consumer demand for amateur content is trending up (videos filed in Pornhub's Amateur category boast the site's longest average view time: 15 minutes, 25 seconds), subscription sites including OnlyFans, FanCentro and JustFor.Fans are grooming a new generation of self-made men and women. And many of them are adult performers working from home.



Those subscription sites are just a few of the third-party platforms whose main services support sex workers striving for economic independence. Why spend time toiling for a suit when you can sell directly to your audience on your own schedule and your own terms? It's the remote-ification of porn. The potential impact—and what's likely making some porn-tube giants anxious—is the antiquation of studio-produced adult entertainment. If sex workers can own their content outright while growing their audiences with the promise of on-demand, how can Pornhub, whose library largely comprises studio-based productions, refresh its offerings? Jean offers a vivid example to spell out the benefits of OnlyFans over free streaming: "I don't do anal unless it's on my OnlyFans or my Snapchat," she says. "That's how I locked in my people."

Most sites' subscription models involve a monthly fee for access to exclusive images, videos and chat sessions that are typically but not exclusively pornographic. Workout videos, product reviews presented by models in various states of undress and selfies of women applying makeup are also sold, based on the account. Content creators pay a fee, in the form of a percentage, to use the platform. FanCentro, which operates on Snapchat's platform but is unaffiliated with the Snap Inc.–owned app, takes 25 percent of subscription fees; in exchange it provides models with their own URLs, as well as a payment-collection service—important, given that PayPal, Venmo, Square, Cash App and nearly all other payment processors do not allow transactions for sex work or services.

Professional porn stars have had their own websites since the advent of the internet, and Pornhub allows anyone to upload content to its ever-growing database. But just as musicians complain about Spotify's payouts, performers view Pornhub's returns as poor: on average, 64 cents per 1,000 views. Jean doesn't even maintain a personal website; after talking to other actresses, she realized that "OnlyFans and Snapchat is where the money is."

• • •

Across industries, new technologies are helping purveyors sell content to niche audiences. This is the strategy behind those sponsored posts for athleisure wear or mail-order meal prep interspersed among puppies and food porn on Instagram. But when it comes to adult content, performers still have to operate in legal gray areas while taking advantage of always-plugged-in consumers' fondness for personalized subscription services (Netflix, Trunk Club) and direct-to-consumer brands (Kylie Jenner's Lip Kits, Casper).

Stephanie Michelle, a hentai-inspired performer, recently shifted her focus to OnlyFans from other platforms. There, she forfeits 20 percent of her earnings from her content, all of which sits behind a paywall. Daily, she posts 30-second to minute-long clips while chatting with

her fans. Such engagement helps her know which content they like best. In turn, fans remain satisfied, paying customers longer.

Even Pornhub's headliners are on OnlyFans, including Riley Reid, the Los Angeles–based porn star who recently tallied more than 1 billion views on Pornhub. In fact, she's on almost every third-party site so people can find her no matter where they're searching. "I monetize greater off myself by working for myself," she says. "I think more girls are realizing that you can get more out of *you* selling your body online and owning your own content."

Reid doesn't want to miss an opportunity to sell content, and she doesn't. People are consistently buying subscriptions and accessing video clips on networks she doesn't even promote. Her primary focuses are her FanCentro-operated Snapchat and her personal website, ReidMyLips.com, where she offers studio-level porn content for around $9.99 per video or monthly passes for $34.99.

For those with less dedicated audiences, building a custom site can be more of a hassle than it's worth. Hoesha, an OnlyFans account owner in Arizona, tried to sell adult content on her own platform, with mixed results. Messaging fans individually was not too time-consuming; collecting payment, however, became tricky once her original payment processor banned her after too many fans wrote explicit messages in their payment memos. She was also tired of fans haggling over price.

"My rates are my rates. I can plainly say what I'm selling and be as explicit as I need to be with my subscribers," she says of OnlyFans. The 20 percent cut frustrates her, but owning her content is a perk. "At the end of it all, it's all yours. You have the rights to your content, whereas with Snapchat or sending clips directly, you don't. If my content leaks, OnlyFans makes it way easier to track down the source." After less than half a year on the platform, Hoesha, whose offerings last year included a nude review of Popeyes viral chicken sandwich, has nearly enough subscribers to stay afloat without a day job.

Danny Labito, an amateur gay fetish creator from Detroit, moved his fans from Pornhub's Modelhub, where his earnings were bleak, to OnlyFans. Occasionally some of his loyal OnlyFans viewers will message him for private commissions. He negotiates rates for custom content on Twitter, Instagram and e-mail, and his patrons pay him through PayPal or Cash App. Selling sexual content violates both these processors' terms, but he uses them anyway. "There aren't many other payment options for sex workers," he says. In his first three months, he made $7,000 from OnlyFans subscriptions and tips, supplementing the full-time job he holds while he finishes college.

For someone like Reid, managing content sales and subscribers can become nearly impossible. It's one of the reasons she finally decided to partner with FanCentro—which promised to do "all the dirty work"—after years of offers to "join the premium Snapchat bandwagon."

Joining that bandwagon would mean manually adding and deleting users from her accounts—arguably the most tedious part of using premium Snapchat. If someone cancels a subscription, access must be revoked manually or Reid risks sending content for free. For a sense of scale, Reid says she regularly hits Snapchat's maximum of 5,000 followers per account and has to create sister accounts—all of which distribute the same content. The operation is so large that Reid has three smartphones solely so she doesn't have to log in and out on one device.

• • •

As these third-party tools multiply, claiming they can help sex workers make up to $100,000 a month (the amount Reid says FanCentro estimates she could pull in), sex work is far from autonomous or fail-safe. Because FanCentro functions with Snapchat but is not involved with Snap Inc., creators who violate the app's industry-typical terms by uploading "pornographic content" can be banned. Jean's Snapchat has been deleted three times already.

"I'm not sure what will happen when Snapchat catches up and everyone is removed, but as of now, I encourage all the girls, and myself, to milk it as much as possible," Reid says.

I ask Jean if subscription sites can contribute to the normalization of sex work. "Even though not everyone will do it, everyone wants to do it," she tells me. "When I get online, I'll see girls who aren't in the industry. They're Instagram models. Their followers sign up because they're like, 'I've been wanting to see this girl naked.' "

This doesn't make them porn stars, at least not according to Reid. "I don't think they understand what it's like to go to set and have sex with someone you've never met, where there's a guy over there with the boom," she says.





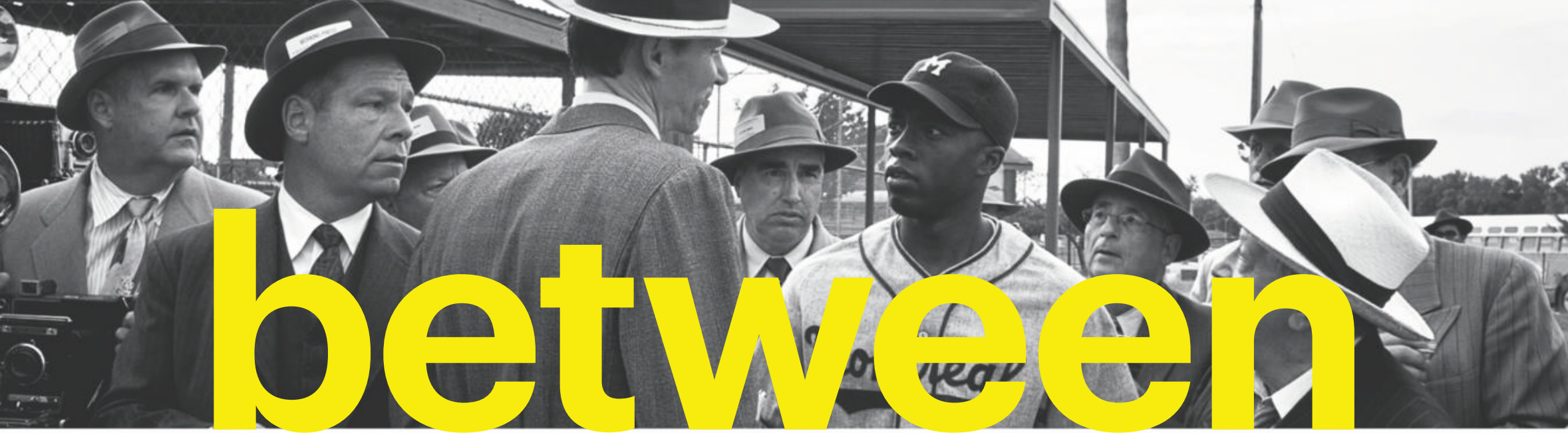
The truth is, with the options now available, they'll likely never have to. But cracking the surface of mainstream consciousness through OnlyFans and FanCentro doesn't always equate to mainstream acceptance. After all, SUBSCRIBE NOW buttons don't change laws or end discrimination. Not overnight. Not even over years.

The trouble is that today, self-promotion on the internet—and with it, self-acceptance—is a necessity. To be successful on these so-called fan sites, visibility is required. Keeping your business a secret doesn't result in more sales. This means legions of sex workers are actively advertising their services on social media to millions, cashing in every day that they're not being shut down.

For all their disruption, these sites have hardly progressed the sex workers' rights movement. "Sex work is work," as the rallying cry goes. They have, however, created opportunities for sex workers to build community and financial mobility in the age of FOSTA-SESTA, when basic online tools such as message boards have been shuttered in the government's attempt to end "sex trafficking." Amid the exodus from studios, the promised land remains what it's been for decades: validity, rights and respect across legal systems.

As Reid argues, "It's such a normal thing for people to be selling their bodies on the internet."



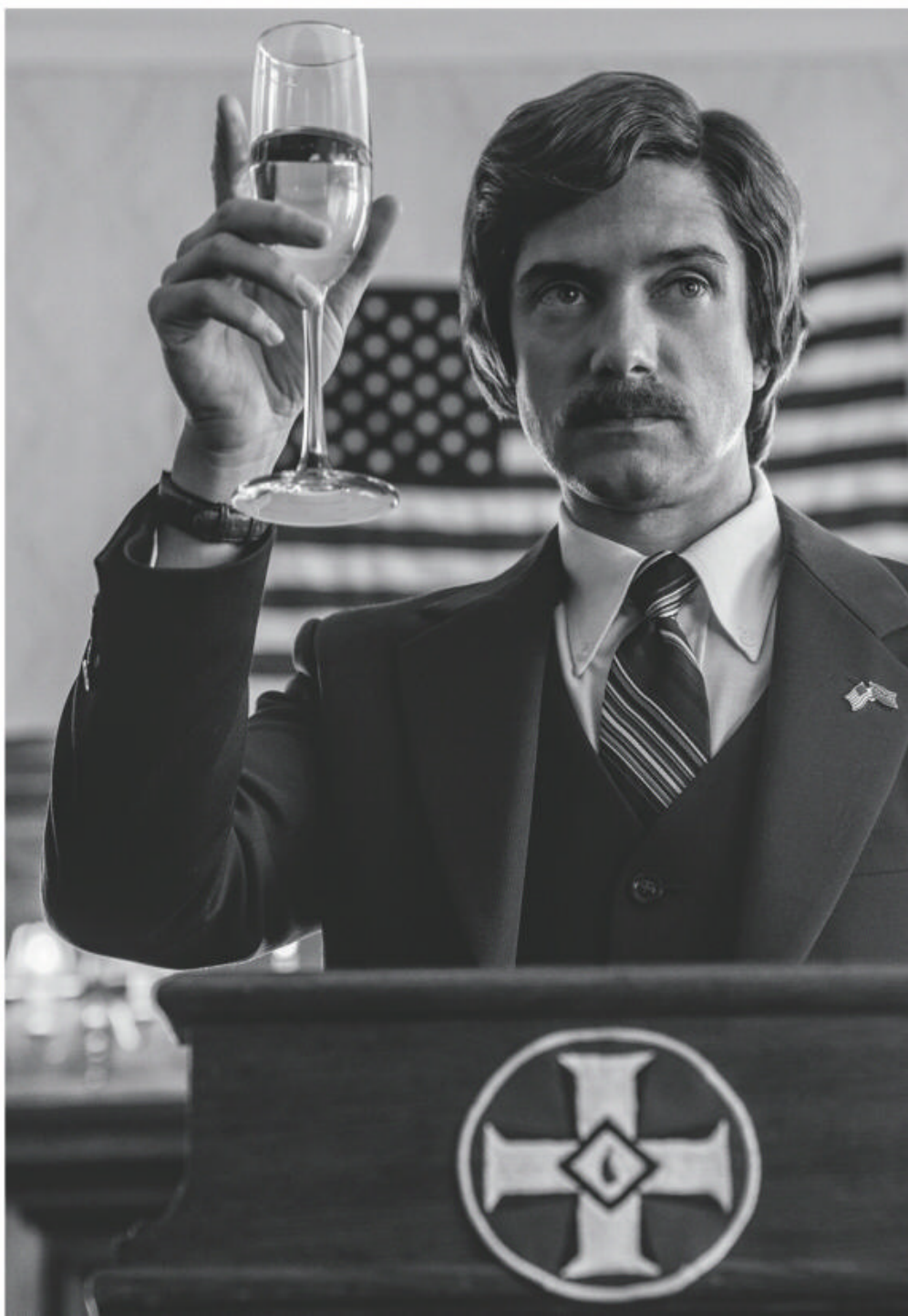


between

How does it feel to bring a racist to life? Seven actors share the challenges and responsibilities of embodying hatred

The Klan member. The bigoted politician. The slur-spouting athlete. A staple of cinematic evil, roles steeped in racism have never been a simple undertaking for the performers tasked with playing them. While audiences have always loved a good villain, the on-screen depiction of racism carries perhaps more weight today than in previous eras. After all, this is a time when President Donald Trump's vitriol is an accepted presence on Twitter feeds; when NPR publicly defends its labeling of that same president's rhetoric as racist; when we're just two years removed from the deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia; and when mass shootings perpetrated on any given day instill persistent fear and anguish. Does art inform how we identify prejudice in our own lives, and do the stories we tell on-screen exacerbate or salve the pain? PLAYBOY spoke with seven actors about their racist roles to examine how we represent hatred in art, the risks and nuances of understanding such mind-sets and the power in reflecting the current state of America.—*David Dennis Jr.*

Above: The biopic *42* depicts the struggles of Jackie Robinson, the first African American player in the major leagues.
Right: Topher Grace's portrayal of David Duke was nominated, along with the rest of the *BlacKkKlansman* ensemble, for a Screen Actors Guild Award for outstanding film cast.



"Duke rebranded **racism.** He made it more **palatable**—that's true **evil.**"

Topher Grace

Real-life KKK leader David Duke in Spike Lee's 2019 Oscar winner *BlacKkKlansman*

On confronting Duke's charm: "Duke rebranded racism. He's very charming and disarming, so he made racism more palatable—that's true evil. The night before I went in to read for Spike, I was rehearsing alone, and I still couldn't say half the words. I told Spike, 'I'm really uncomfortable speaking like this.' If you do that with the wrong director, and you don't pay it off the right way, it's very dangerous to make someone look charismatic. But Duke's charisma is what makes him so powerful."

William Sadler

Detective Michael Sheehan in Ava DuVernay's 2019 Emmy-winning Netflix miniseries *When They See Us*

On Sheehan intimidating the Central Park Five into confessing: "During a scene with my co-star Asante Blackk, Ava DuVernay took me aside and said, 'I want you to scare him.' So I unleashed this character, and when I finished, I asked Asante, 'Are you okay?' and gave him a hug. I'm not comfortable playing those people, but the better I do it, the more impact the story has. It's more important than ever before that we tell stories like these."

Garrett Hedlund

Mike Burden in the 2020 film *Burden,* the real-life story of a Klansman who inherits a KKK memorabilia shop before finding redemption

On filming in the KKK shop: "As the crew was setting up, a father and son were walking around. A crew member asked if they worked on set, and the father said, 'Hell no, we're shopping. About time a goddamn place like this opened up.' That allowed us to see how real this is. It made our commitment to the project stronger."

Alan Tudyk

Baseball manager Ben Chapman in *42,* the 2013 Jackie Robinson biopic

On using the *N* word: "While rehearsing those words, I would get tears in my eyes, which wasn't good for the scene. So I would watch these violent street-fight videos, and I'd get a knot in my stomach and I'd just get angry. And then I wouldn't cry anymore when I said the word. It was like I got dipped in hate."

William Fichtner

District attorney flack Jake Flanagan in 2006's best picture winner *Crash*

On whether Flanagan's racial button-pushing makes him racist: "Under his breath, my character says, 'Fucking black people.' The point of the scene is about choices we make in life and how we can end up in uncool circumstances. I didn't look at him as just racially motivated, but I saw that piece of him when he pulled that card out."

Burgess Jenkins

Ray Budds, one of the villains in 2000's fact-based *Remember the Titans*

On his approach to the persistently racist football star: "The guy is angry and frustrated and feels betrayed, and everybody has felt angry, frustrated and betrayed. The key is to figure out the emotional value and connect to it, rather than judge them and say, 'Okay, this guy's a racist jerk.' Well, they don't see themselves as racist jerks."

Catherine Kellner

Fannie Taylor in John Singleton's 1997 movie *Rosewood,* based on a true story of a white woman who falsely accuses a black man of rape in the 1920s

On the film's most intense scenes: "I'd go into my trailer and breathe into a paper bag because I was so nervous. But the cast and John Singleton kept saying, 'Do it, because people need to know.' In scenes where I cry over and over, part of me honestly wept because of my own ignorance, because the subject matter was so real. But it became one of the best experiences of my life."

the lines



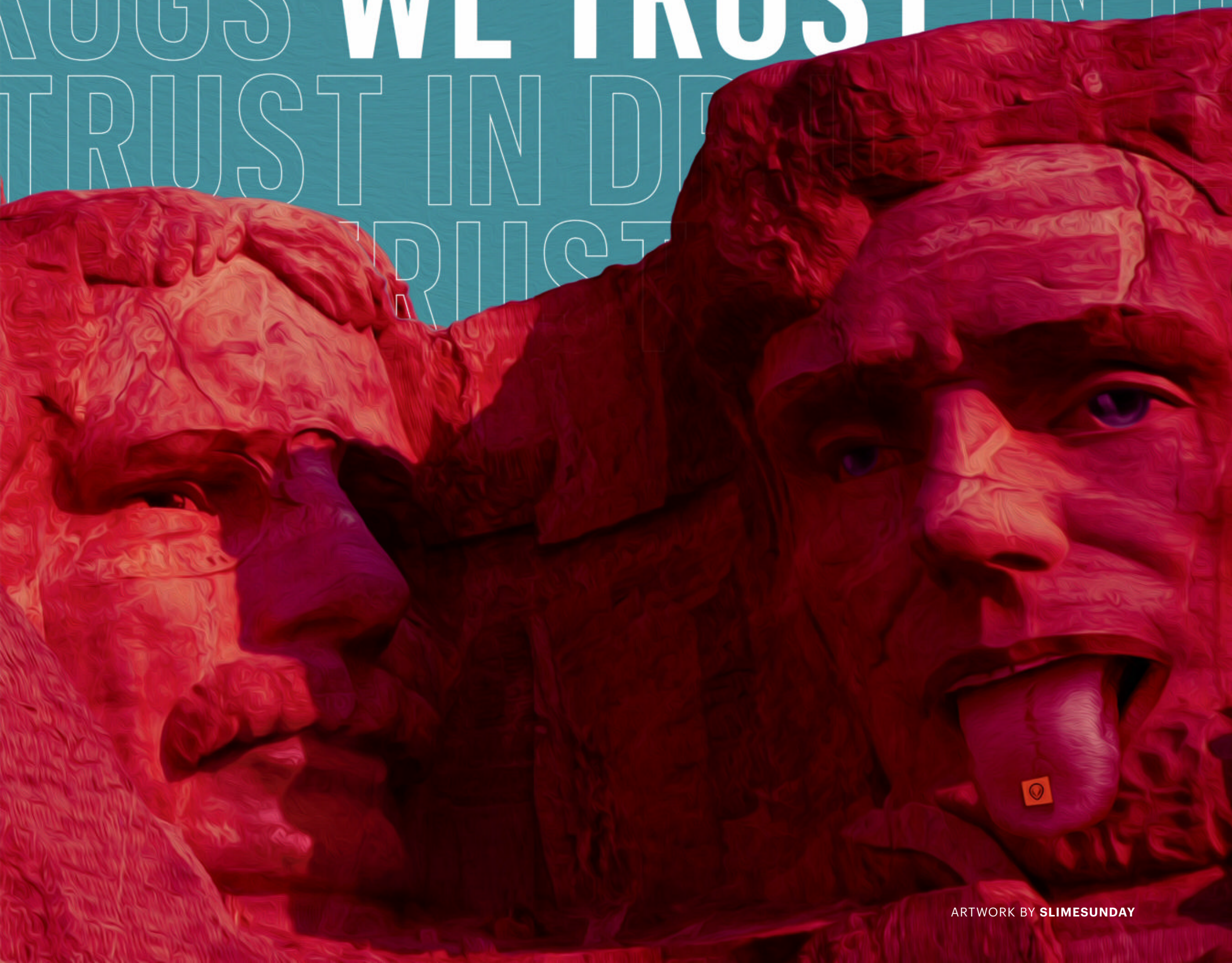
William Sadler channels Detective Sheehan in Ava DuVernay's four-part series about the Central Park Five.

IN DRUGS

What would happen if the United States decriminalized drug possession? A veteran drug-policy expert offers some trippy outcomes

BY JAG DAVIES

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ARTWORK BY **SLIMESUNDAY**

The drug policies in this country are preposterous. As long as people who use drugs are treated like criminals, mass criminalization and mass overdose deaths will remain two of the greatest ongoing tragedies in the United States.

Accidental drug overdoses are the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 50, exceeding fatalities from gun violence, car accidents, homicide and HIV/AIDS. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, more than 68,000 deadly drug overdoses occurred in the United States in 2018 alone.

At the same time, U.S. law enforcement makes an arrest for drug possession every 25 seconds, adding up to well over 1 million arrests a year. It's the single most common reason for arrest in the country. These arrests do nothing to reduce the use of drugs; in fact, criminalization amplifies safety risks by pushing people who use drugs away from public health services.

What if I told you that decriminalization of all drugs (yes, *all* drugs) could put an end to that? Under decriminalization, people who are caught using or possessing a small amount of drugs or are found with drug paraphernalia would no longer face criminal penalties, meaning any form of criminal punishment (including arrest, jail and imprisonment) would be abolished.

This idea—to cease to treat drug possession as an unlawful offense—isn't as outlandish as it may seem. According to a poll conducted by the Cato Institute, 55 percent of Americans support decriminalization. The leading governmental, medical, public health and civil rights groups—including the American Civil Liberties Union and the Global Commission on Drug Policy, plus celebrity activists such as Richard Branson—have also supported decriminalization, arguing that drug-policy reformation would revolutionize how the U.S. handles use and addiction.

Decriminalization has proven to be transformative in other nations across the world. Numerous countries, including the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Spain and, most notably, Portugal, have had remarkable success with it.

The Portuguese regime, established by António Salazar in 1932, closed the country off from the rest of the world for 40 years. When the suppressive rule abruptly ended in 1974, in came the drugs the country had barely experienced before. By the 1990s, one in 100 people in Portugal was addicted to heroin, and the country's rate of HIV infection had hit the highest in the European Union. But since 2001, when Portugal became the first country to decriminalize all drugs, the number of people voluntarily entering treatment has increased significantly as rates of addiction and adolescent drug use have fallen. From 2000 to 2015, HIV infections in Portugal plummeted from 104.2 new cases per million to 4.2 cases per million.

Given decriminalization's successful track record, senior levels of government are attempting to pave the way for it in an array of countries, including Canada, Ghana, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, Norway and Scotland. Still, only a handful of U.S. policy makers have embraced the idea.



Some progress has been made in reforming the war on drugs in the United States—but mostly by cities and states, not by the federal government. Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Oklahoma, Oregon and Utah have reduced drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. Dozens of cities around the country have instituted pre-arrest diversion programs, such as Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion. "911 Good Samaritan" laws, some of which limit criminalization at the scene of an overdose for witnesses who call for emergency medical assistance, have been adopted in all 50 states.

Progress has also been made toward cannabis legalization in all 50 states, giving hope that once-unthinkable drug reforms can happen with positive results. Since Colorado, Washington, Alaska, Oregon, Washington, D.C., California, Massachusetts, Maine, Nevada, Michigan, Illinois and Vermont approved measures to legalize cannabis, states have saved millions and are allocating the dollars earned from cannabis taxes to civil sectors. In Colorado, for instance, $225 million in tax revenue was distributed to the Colorado Department of Education from 2015 to 2018. A study published in the journal *Economic Inquiry* shows compelling evidence that opioid-overdose deaths in states that have legalized recreational cannabis drop by 20 to 35 percent.

The national debate around cannabis has evolved from whether the remaining states should legalize it to *how* they should legalize it. But even though a 2018 Rasmussen Reports survey found that only nine percent of likely U.S. voters deem the war on drugs a success—and despite positive case studies ranging from Portugal's decriminalization to cannabis legalization stateside—the Trump administration is making moves to ramp



up the drug war. This marks a shift away from modest Obama-era reforms that slowed the growth of mass incarceration. Trump and his ilk have weaponized the overdose crisis in an attempt to demonize immigrants and people of color—even calling for the death penalty for people who sell drugs.

U.S. voters may soon decide on drug decriminalization for the first time: In September 2019, activists in Oregon filed Petition 2020-044, which will likely come to a vote in November 2020. If passed, it will decriminalize simple possession and refer offenders to a range of voluntary services such as evidence-based treatment, harm-reduction programs and housing services. The savings on law enforcement—as well as the revenue from cannabis taxes—would fund these programs.

Some Democratic presidential candidates, such as Bernie Sanders, include far-reaching drug-policy reforms in their platforms. "We are going to end the international embarrassment of having more people in jail than any other country on earth. Instead of spending $80 billion a year on jails and incarceration, we are going to invest in jobs and education for our young people," Sanders promises on his campaign website. Yet as of press time no 2020 presidential candidate has made a full-throated endorsement of ending arrests for drug possession and implementing Portugal-style decriminalization.

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So what would the United States look like if we stopped treating drug users as criminals? Mass incarceration and mass criminalization—which are major drivers of economic inequality, health disparities and systemic racism—would decrease significantly. The criminalization that targets lower-income communities would slowly wither, affording those affected an opportunity to support themselves and their families.

We would no longer fear years like 2018, when law enforcement arrested about 1.43 million people for possessing small amounts of drugs for personal use. The American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch could work on releasing the 137,000 people they estimate are behind bars in U.S. prisons and jails on any given day for drug possession—many of them being held pre-trial because they can't afford to post bail. Thousands more currently locked up for failing drug tests as a condition of probation or parole could start working toward their freedom.

Black people, who represent 13 percent of the U.S. population and use drugs at similar rates as other groups, would no longer account for 29 percent of people arrested for drug-law violations and 33 percent of people incarcerated in state prisons for drug possession. Law enforcement would be able to divert resources to serious public safety concerns—such as the 67 percent of reported rapes that went uncleared in 2018 and the thousands of rape kits that went unprocessed.

If mass drug-possession arrests stop in the U.S., the thousands of people currently deported every year for possessing any amount of drugs would no longer fear losing their homes. Permanent residents—many of whom have been in the U.S. for decades and have jobs and families—would no longer live with the anxiety caused by the automatic detention and deportation, often without the possibility of return, for being caught with any amount of any drug.

One may hypothesize that fewer drug-possession arrests would mean more crime on the streets, but the Pew Charitable Trusts reported in 2017 that there is "no relationship between drug imprisonment and drug problems," because under decriminalization, people would still be arrested for committing crimes under the influence of drugs. Decriminalization would only mean that police could no longer waste taxpayer dollars arresting people for possession.

Decriminalization also makes it easier to ramp up health and harm-reduction services that are known to drastically reduce addiction, overdose deaths and new hepatitis C and HIV infections. Evidence-based drug treatment could more easily be offered to anyone who wants it. For those who continue to use drugs, services to reduce potential harm—such as screening unregulated drugs for adulterants, community-based naloxone distribution, syringe-access programs, supervised consumption sites and other long-proven approaches—could also be made more widely available.

All the pieces are in place for drug decriminalization to take effect in the U.S. Now we just have to demand that our leaders act. To truly end the war on drugs and avoid new public health crises, we need to accept that criminalizing possession offers no solutions or hope for real cultural transformation.

ORVILLE

The man behind the mask has a voice of gold and nothing to hide. What will it take for a hidebound genre to embrace the new cowboy in town?

BY **MARISSA R. MOSS**

Man in His Domain

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ALYSSE GAFKJEN**



The aptly named "party switch" featured in every room at the Dive Motel in Nashville has four options: SEX, DRUGS, ROCK & ROLL and SLEEP. Orville Peck, in a pair of horse-print tighty-whities, is boogying to the SEX station, which blasts 1970s R&B while a rotating disco ball shimmers in sparkly pink hues overhead. The lack of a television, plus the bright geometric wallpaper and deep shag carpeting, signals that this renovated roadside inn isn't the kind of place you visit for a family-friendly good time. But on this sweaty Tennessee afternoon the only thing splayed across the bed sheets is Peck's collection of handmade lace-up masks. Gold fringe, long red fringe, short cream fringe, mid-length pink fringe. Fringe galore, yee-haw, amen.

Peck fastens on one of his masks—which he hopes never to be seen in public without—pairing it with an embroidered Nudie-style suit. Someone suggests we crank up the party switch to DRUGS, which features trippy lights and sounds by hip-hop forefather Grandmaster Flash. The country artist is pleased, mostly with his outfit.

"I do like the Porter Wagoner look," Peck says, referring to the 1960s twangy crooner who made sparkly, chain-stitched getups part of his signature look. Wagoner, however—at least as far as we know—never cracked a whip while listening to "White Lines." The musician moves to another bedroom, this one featuring side-by-side bathtubs and more shag, to snap additional photos. He stands on a bed and gives a hearty crack to a long, vintage-leather lasso.

"I'm good with a whip," the superhero-like figure announces, an innuendo that would no doubt cause fidgeting across town on Music Row, the epicenter of Nashville's commercial country-music industry. While fluid sexuality has long been embraced in pop music, the naughtiest images to ship out of this town tend toward a tight-pantsed Luke Bryan singing about "knockin' boots." For someone like Peck, who is openly gay, a career in mainstream country has almost always been out of reach. Just seven years ago, in 2013, country radio penalized Kacey Musgraves for alluding to kissing girls on "Follow Your Arrow"; the song never charted higher than 43 on *Billboard*'s Country Airplay chart despite being named song of the year at the 2014 Country Music Association Awards. The genre, conventional wisdom would like you to believe, is conservative, and the only viable path for an aspiring artist who happens to embrace gayness is country-adjacent. But times are changing. Nashville is starting to demand a party switch.

"See," Peck says, flicking the whip in an impressive wave motion with a controlled snap of the wrist, all cowboy confident, "I told y'all."

Peck, who put out his debut LP, *Pony*, on Sub Pop in March, sings about relationships with men because that's who he is, not because he has an agenda. The sexiness in his songs comes more from a sonic palette that sometimes sounds like Chris Isaak than from character-playing. Much has been murmured about Peck's sexuality and his "subversive" role in country; almost as much has been made of his masked anonymity. All three aspects are captivating, for sure, but they represent a fraction of the whole: Peck speaks about being a gay man in country music not to spur a revolution but to find a role for folks like him in a genre that, historically, hasn't





been welcoming. If anything, he's a traditionalist at heart. Dolly Parton and Wagoner are his North Stars in a cosmos that also includes Merle Haggard. And no, Orville Peck isn't his real name, but no one makes a stink about Eilleen Regina Edwards, the woman we know as Shania Twain.

His photo shoot done, Peck, now in a T-shirt on the hotel patio, smokes a cigarette through his fringe, which is parted down the middle like a set of curtains. "I'm not setting out to be an instigator," he says. "In fact, my songwriting is probably more in line with traditional country than a lot of country now."

He's not wrong: Peck's songs don't imitate Haggard's per se, but neither do those of the subgenre that includes Sam Hunt and Florida Georgia Line crooning about women, pickup trucks and beer. When compared toe-to-toe with the bro-country groups that dominate popular radio, Peck is no more indie rock than



they are hip-hop. But a fear lingers that queer singers like Peck are trying to warp country into another liberal bastion. Peck doesn't see it as a changing of the guard so much as an opportunity to be a part of what's been built.

Country's queens—Parton, in particular—were Peck's inspiration and role models, but he soon realized the genre as a whole wasn't ready to invite him in; it's an experience that's relatable for many people whose stories have been excluded from the country canon. It's not that people of color or queer people haven't had a role in Nashville's understructure; it's that their impacts have been diminished and muted. This isn't entirely the fault of country music itself. As Nadine Hubbs discusses in *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music,* classism has resulted in the dismissal of country as the province of unsophisticated hillbillies.

"Even just a few banjo or fiddle notes," Hubbs writes, "can suffice to convey qualities including rusticity, Southernness, stupidity or lack of sophistication, and violent bigotry, especially racism and homophobia." When the middle and elite classes use the refrain "anything but country" to describe their musical interests, they're signaling not just personal taste but economic background and political affinity. Classifying country music as the antithesis of sophistication promotes the idea that it can't be appreciated by anyone who lacks white skin and a blue collar.

"I think the stigma that country music is made by a certain type of person, and is only for a certain type of person, is something perpetuated by big-wig old white men who run record labels and feel like that's how they can keep in control," says Peck, stubbing out his cigarette. "But look at Willie Nelson. That guy's a weed-smoking gay-rights activist."

"The problem is less about homophobia. It's a **chauvinist** problem."



The issue of otherness in country is further highlighted in the case of Lil Nas X, who came out as gay following the success of his 2019 hit, "Old Town Road." After he was nominated for a Country Music Association Award (for musical event of the year), a flood of national headlines erroneously declared him the first openly gay person to snag such an honor. In the past decade, openly gay artists Shane McAnally and Brandy Clark have been recognized by the CMAs. The media's lazy assumption speaks to the view of country as a "hillbilly" home where there can't possibly be space for queer folks, resulting in erasure by accident. Country's gay community hasn't always been heard, but it is rich, and critics often confuse the Music Row machine and country radio—where queer voices are indeed silenced—with the music makers themselves.

As the world considers more interpretations of sexuality and gender, and country music becomes a global commodity that needs to react to those trends, there's space in the expanding universe for a star like Peck. "Whether they even recognize the reasoning, I think a lot of gay people feel detached from country music," he says. "But marginalized people of any kind have to bushwhack and blaze our own trails a lot of the time. Those paths aren't there for us, and it's usually in the face of a lot of adversity or a lot of judgment."

It's a complicated balance to recognize the role queer people have played in country music and also acknowledge how they've been curbed. Peck knows this history well, from Lavender Country, the band credited with releasing the first gay country album in 1973 (Peck has sung with them), to Willie Nelson's 2006 version of the cowboy-lovin' anthem "Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly Fond of Each Other" (Peck has covered it). His mask is reminiscent of Jimmy "Orion" Ellis, a 1970s and 1980s country singer with Presleyan vocals and an affinity for obscuring his face. Peck's masks are more SM than bedazzling like Ellis's, but a mask nonetheless signifies a love of showmanship.

"My introduction to country music was Dolly Parton when I was a kid, and I didn't know she was a real person," Peck says. "I thought she was like Elvira or something, because she was this larger-than-life character. That's the country music I love. People always think I'm playing a character, but that's not it at all. It's about a super-heightened version of yourself to tell the story better, which is what Dolly does. She wears wigs—she's a drag queen, basically—but she sings these sincere, heartbreaking songs, and it's all very genuine. That's kind of what I try to do."

Although Peck maintains his mysterious persona, he hasn't made up a past that doesn't exist. He's an entertainer, not a myth. Peck grew up all over, with a father who was a sound engineer for glam-rock bands including Suzi Quatro and a mother who valued creativity; he has two brothers. A trained ballet dancer and singer obsessed with David Bowie and cowboys, Peck had started performing by the age of 10. He taught himself to play guitar, performed in punk bands and studied the art of mask-making before recording *Pony* on Gabriola Island in British Columbia.

"I think most people want to discount me as a hipster who's dipping my toe into this yee-haw agenda," Peck says. "But the reality is, this has been me for a long time. This has been a dream of mine my whole life."

His country dream is coming to fruition at a time when change is increasingly unavoidable, at least in terms of integrating queer voices and supporting LGBTQ people. Miranda Lambert dedicated her song "All Kinds of Kinds" to WorldPride 2019, which she attended in New York City; Carrie Underwood's "Love Wins" hints apolitically at equality; and Maren Morris is a fierce and outspoken advocate, as are Musgraves and Margo Price. Nashville is also evolving: Its music community rallied fast and hard when former Arkansas governor and vocal homophobe Mike Huckabee joined the CMA Foundation's board in 2018. He resigned in less than 24 hours.

Newer artists like Brandon Stansell are leaning in to mainstream careers as queer people, following in the path of Ty Herndon and Chely Wright, who both came out years after their debuts but whose careers never benefited from their truths. On the indie end, acts such as Karen & the Sorrows, Trixie Mattel and Little Bandit are breaching the genre to make it more inclusive. Brandi Carlile, a queer artist and 2019 Grammy nominee for album of the year, is doubling down on her commitment to the genre, producing country records, singing duets with Dierks Bentley and forming the female supergroup the Highwomen.

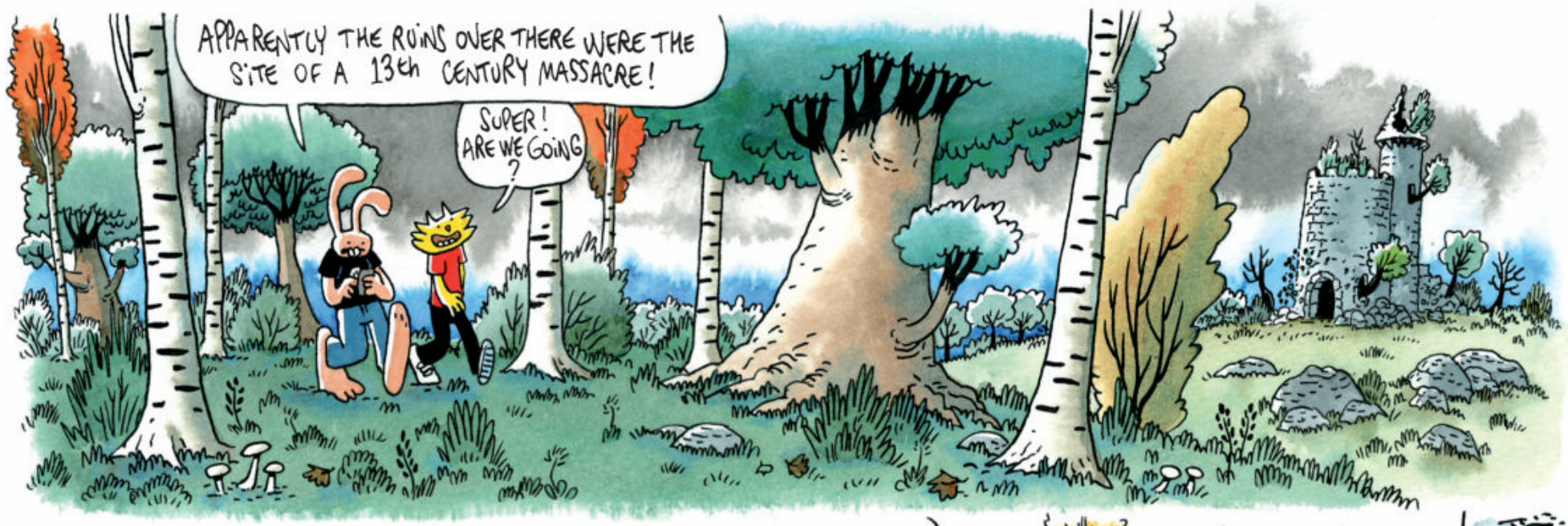
"She's really changing the narrative," says Peck, who sees a link between how country music has historically sidelined women and how it currently treats the queer community. "I feel like the problem is less about homophobia. It's a chauvinist problem," he says. "Female musicians go through this all the time. The gatekeepers of country, as is the way with everything on this planet, tend to be conservative, straight white men. I think that's kind of ending. I really do believe it."

Peck has dreams too: of performing at the CMA Awards, singing at Nelson's ranch and, of course, appearing at the Grand Ole Opry. He thinks they'll all come true, because despite the mask, he has never been less hidden in his life.

"I genuinely feel like I'm on a horse riding into the sunset, on my own terms," he says before disappearing into the hotel room with his bed of masks. There's a cowboy battle raging in Nashville, and Peck has been practicing with his whip.

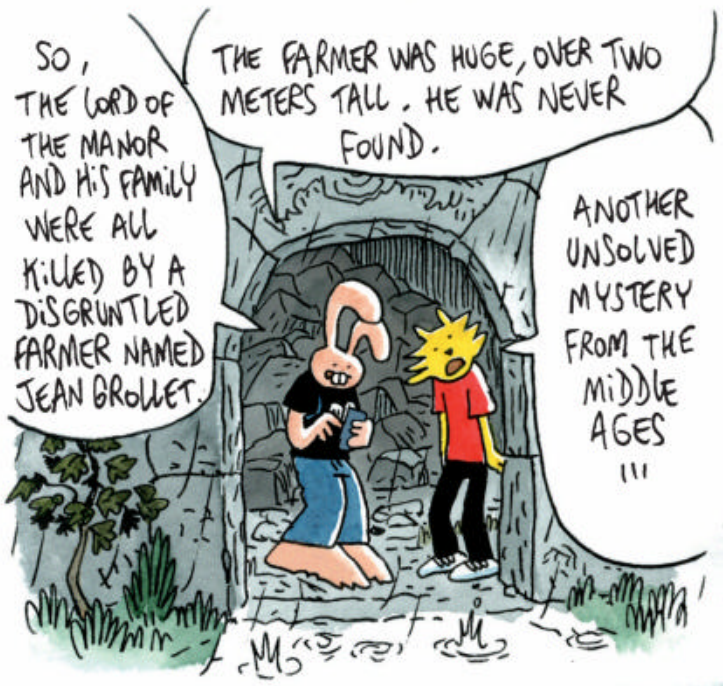
Countrysidekick

A PASTORAL ADVENTURE OF LAPINOT AND RICHARD BY LEWIS TRONDHEIM



















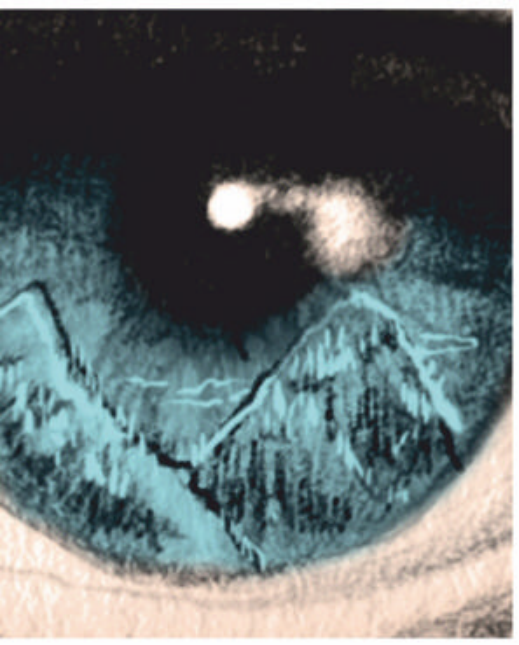
HA HA HA!
THE FIRST ONE TO FIND SOMETHING GETS TO KEEP IT!
Woo Hoo! ALL RIGHT!
HEY, WAIT!
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
NOTHING JUST YET, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING...
I FEEL IT ...
IT JUST LOOKS LIKE A ROTTEN OLD CELLAR.
HOLD ON... WAIT... SOMETHING SPECTACULAR WILL HAPPEN.
YOU KNOW, WE'VE HAD A LOOK AROUND. UNLIKE MOVIES, REAL LIFE ISN'T SCRIPTED BY ANYONE.
MMM...
REAL LIFE STINKS !!!
NOW, HOLD ON...
YOU FOUND A MOMENT OF PURE HAPPINESS HERE. THAT'S THE REAL PRIZE.
PFFT...
THERE COULD HAVE BEEN A CRYPT !!
A TREASURE !!!
GHOSTS !!!
BUT NO!!! NOTHING AT ALL!
BETWEEN YOU AND ME, IT'S POSSIBLE WE ENCOUNTERED OTHERWORLDLY ENTITIES...
OH, REALLY? COOL! TELL ME!
THE SAME MICROSCOPIC FUNGI THAT GAVE HORRIBLE LUNG INFECTIONS TO THOSE WHO DISCOVERED TUTANKHAMEN !!! AND WE'LL DIE TWO WEEKS FROM NOW !!!

- End of chapter one - Christophe

The Good *Witch*

With the release of a scorching new book and the return of her hit show, writer **Lindy West** finds herself at a crossroads—what happens when you don't have to be shrill anymore?

BY **ERIC SPITZNAGEL**



Lindy West is sitting in a director's chair—so big, she says, it's "almost a hammock"—in a Portland, Oregon warehouse filled with cameras and an inordinate number of crew members with handlebar mustaches. As she glances up at the monitors, watching actors repeat lines she helped write, she reflects on her hypothetical death.

"I was exhausted, but I felt proud of myself," she says of a recent six-mile mountain hike across often treacherous terrain. As she was traversing a high, narrow trail, she crossed paths with three other hikers, all young and fit.

"I had this realization that if one of them accidentally bumped me off the trail and I tumbled down this ravine, and if someone caught it on video, people would think it was funny," she says. "It wouldn't be 'Woman Tragically Plummets to Her Death.' It would be 'Look at the Fatty Roll.' "

It's hard to know whether to laugh or nod grimly when West shares stories like this. The 37-year-old writer and producer has made a career of this balancing act, pointing out injustice while also being one of the most uproarious social critics of her generation.

Dressed in a Queen T-shirt knotted at the belly and a form-fitting leopard-skin skirt, West exudes fabulousness with just a hint of *I'm not entirely sure about this.* She's also exhausted. They're in the final weeks of shooting the second season of *Shrill,* a series inspired by her best-selling essay collection of the same name. (The show returns to Hulu in January.) The first season was beloved by both critics and viewers, and the show was promptly renewed. The pressure is on to keep the bar high.

"It feels like a lot more responsibility," she says, keeping an eye on a scene in which Aidy Bryant, the *Saturday Night Live* regular and *Shrill*'s lead, gets into a heated exchange with her fictional boyfriend. "I'm glad I wasn't given this kind of long leash when I was 23. I probably would've made something really bad."

Over the course of the day, West mentions several times that for most of her career it was just her on a couch, wrestling words out of her head in an otherwise empty apartment. Now she's sitting in a crowded soundstage where "there are always a million moving parts and a million things to do. Sometimes it's a last-minute *zhuzhing* of the script, and sometimes it's the props department needing me to sign off on some tiny detail that viewers probably won't even notice."

Shrill the TV show follows Annie Easton, a character loosely based on West. While the similarities between the two are hard to miss—both Easton and West are writers living in the Pacific Northwest who champion fat-positivity and get hounded by trolls, oblivious passersby and many others—the fictional counterpart has a long way to go before she reaches present-day Lindy-ness.

"She doesn't seem like a character who'd be like, 'Yes, I'm a witch and I'm hunting you,' " West says, referring to her recent book of essays, *The Witches Are*

ILLUSTRATION BY **EWELINA DYMEK**

of the
Northwest



Coming. (The title is from her 2017 *New York Times* op-ed about #MeToo blowback and men bemoaning "witch hunts" despite "millenniums of treating women like prey.") Of the character's development she adds, "I think we're going to move in that direction slowly. It's her journey toward becoming shrill, or learning how to own that."

West is long past learning how to embrace her inner shrill. She practically owns the word now. She built a career as an outsider critic and satirist of misogynist culture, but she's no longer an outsider; she's a best-selling author and a writer and executive producer on a hugely successful TV show.

> "I'LL WATCH A ***scene*** AND BE LIKE, 'AW, AIDY IS THE ***prettiest*** LEADING LADY I EVER SAW.'"

The subtitle for her first book is *Notes From a Loud Woman*. But she doesn't need to be loud anymore. Everyone is listening.

Which isn't to say she *shouldn't* be loud. The rules change, however, when the world has stopped shushing you, when outlets like *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* are lining up to offer you regular columns and Elizabeth Banks wants to produce a TV show with you. Being loud is a weapon of the ignored and disenfranchised (and, of course, of angry mobs with digital pitchforks), not so much somebody who has the spotlight and a captive audience.

"I was so desperate to make people laugh," West says of her younger self. "I was afraid to be sincere, because it's vulnerable."

It makes you wonder what, if anything, she's scared of now.

• • •

"You think?"

West wrinkles her nose, not sure if she wants to take a compliment. We're in Portland's Pearl District, on a break from the *Shrill* shoot, and talking about her new book—in particular her essay about the late comedian Joan Rivers that I keep insisting is brilliant. West isn't so sure.

"I was worried it was dumb," she says. "I was worried that I was unfairly picking on her."

I contend that it's a careful meditation on a woman largely considered a pioneer in comedy. Uncertainty looms over every sentence as West contemplates an icon stuck in a rigged system. "Instead of fighting for us lost, last girls," she writes, "she turned around and gave worse than she got."

It's a far cry from the West of a decade ago. In 2010, when she was a relative unknown writing for the Seattle alt-weekly *The Stranger,* her caustic reviews of movies such as *Sex and the City 2* went viral thanks to snarky but hilarious observations like "What is the lubrication level of Samantha Jones's 52-year-old vagina?"

West can barely stand to reflect on that early incarnation. "I didn't know anything," she says. "I just wanted to be funny. And I was so mean. Some of the stuff that I wrote about people's work, I would die—I would die if someone wrote that about me."

She settled into a more confident voice at the self-proclaimed "supposedly feminist website" Jezebel in 2012, where she wrote some of her most challenging and controversial essays on sexism, bigotry and body shaming. She could still be ruthlessly funny, but the stakes were higher, and she was learning how to be more nuanced.

"So much of Lindy's writing revolves around issues that aren't black or white," says Jessica Coen, editor in chief at Jezebel during West's tenure. "They can't be distilled down to a single hot take." Many of the topics she writes about (abortion, fat-phobia) don't seem like they'd be entertaining, Coen says, but West always pulls it off because "she writes with so much energy and wit, so while the topic itself might not be a delight, reading her always is."

Comedian Patti Harrison, who has a recurring role on *Shrill,* was affected by West long before she joined the cast. She recalls watching West debate the topic of rape jokes with comedian Jim Norton on *Totally Biased* in 2013. West argued that "you don't get to say that comedy is this sacred, powerful, vital thing that we have to protect because it's speaking truth to power blah, blah, blah, and then also be like, 'Well, it's just a joke—I mean, language doesn't affect our lives at all, so shut up!' " For Harrison, it had a seismic effect on how she approached comedy.

"I was doing improv in college at the time, and I believed nothing should be off limits," she says. "But Lindy was so funny and so smart. I wanted to be provocative, and I thought you should be able to say anything, but she shifted my thinking."

When *Shrill* became a TV show, West was given a chance to shift people's thinking on a larger scale. She went from commenting on pop culture to being a part of pop culture. But is *Shrill* changing minds en masse? Or is it just a dot on a TV landscape that idealizes tiny bodies and isn't about to change because of one norm-busting heroine?

Martha Plimpton, who became friends with West long before she co-founded the #ShoutYourAbortion social media campaign in 2015 with fellow Seattleite Amelia Bonow, says she understands the tug-of-war between idealism and making a commercial product.

"You can't overhaul the whole fucking system by sheer will alone," she says. "I'm still figuring it out myself. There are



Aidy Bryant, who plays West's *Shrill* alter ego, shoots a scene on the streets of Portland for the show's first season.

parameters that've been set up that you have absolutely zero power to change. You want your producing and activist sides to intersect as much as possible, but you also can't torture yourself over what you can't do."

West, however, is optimistic that *Shrill* can make an impact. "I can feel it affecting me, and I made it," she says. "I'll watch a scene and be like, 'Aw, Aidy is the prettiest leading lady I ever saw.' I'm not like, 'Who is this fat woman?' Once you start normalizing it in your brain, I think the process happens really fast."

By way of comparison, she recalls a cultural norm whose evolution she witnessed in her early 20s. "The thing that keeps me going, and I don't know why I always return to this when I'm feeling stressed, is the smoking ban," she says. "It seemed unfathomable that you could get people to stop smoking. But then they made a rule, and now it's unfathomable that bars ever *allowed* smoking. You can create a new normal, and people who are otherwise resistant will get used to it. You forget what life was like before, you know?"

• • •

West still gets hate mail. Just the other day, she tells me over dinner, she received a message from a man who wrote, "You're stupid and I heard you wrote a stupid book and I hope it tanks."



But long gone are the days when she would get daily death and rape threats. It's no coincidence that she left Twitter in January 2017.

West insists it wasn't the trolls alone that drove her off the platform, but she's glad that dealing with them is no longer a central part of her job description.

"Why are you entitled to engage with me?" she says of the armies of men who insisted on attacking her—usually anonymously—online. "This is the stuff that started to drive me crazy." Every time she hit back at the barrage of toxic masculinity, it felt "bad for my mental health," she says. "I already feel like I have psychological effects from that time of my life when I had to seem impervious to pain. It's not good for you." And, she adds, "it's not good for your brain to be numb to that."

Eventually West let go—not just of Twitter but of the idea that trolls can be reasoned with, or that there's value in proving how much abuse you can endure. Through the Twitter breach, she emerged as a woman who's more focused, more equipped to fuck up the patriarchy. "Hopefully it's a little bit of a rallying cry," she says of the "witches" title of her new book.

Her next thought reminds me that, earlier that day, we had spoken of the fears that plagued her as an emerging writer.

"There's power in this label that people are putting on you, and we can assume that power," she says. "They're scared of *us*."

• • •

West is vague when discussing what's next for her. More books are likely, and she'll stay with *Shrill* for as long as there's an audience. But she has ambitions that are less about the next career move than, say, exploration.

"I've always had the unspoken thought in my head that I can't go to Japan because I'm too fat," she says. "I'd just Godzilla the whole place, knock everything over and break all the chairs. But that's crazy. It's a regular-size country."

She'd also like to try downhill skiing or scuba diving, two things that terrify her. But her real dream——

"Here," she says, pulling out her phone. "I'll show you."

As she scrolls through Instagram, she tells me about her friend Jenny, who has recently taken up horseback riding. "Jenny told me to follow this Instagram page called African Horse Safaris. It's a real service, and you're basically on a horse that's galloping across the savanna."

She hands me her phone and points to a video. A saddle-cam captures a horseback rider chasing a tower of giraffes somewhere in Tanzania.

"Are you kidding me?" she says, laughing. "That's not CGI, that's real!"

Does she actually want to go to Africa and ride horses amid the roaring wildlife? "I don't know. But it's made me wonder: Is there a reason I *couldn't* do it? I'd have to learn how to ride a horse. It'd have to be a big horse. But horses are strong, whatever."

She keeps flipping through photos and videos. "I'm sure it's probably scary. But maybe that's why I need to do it."

In a weird way, it seems like the perfect next adventure for Lindy West. This is a woman whose entire life has been about doing things that are scary and that the rest of the world told her she couldn't or shouldn't be doing. Is there any difference between shouting about your abortion or feeling proud of your body or pushing back against rape humor and riding a horse at top speed across an African savanna?

West smiles, still transfixed by the images of galloping horses on her phone. "I guess we'll find out."



ARTWORK BY **ALPHACHANNELING**

PLAYBOY ADVISOR

Shan Boodram, clinical sexologist, YouTube star and author of *The Game of Desire,* taps her followers and offers unflaggingly positive advice to a woman who can't stop thinking about sex, a guy who can't get women to like him and others whose dilemmas may just be your own

Q: *Is it normal to think about sex 24/7? I'm a 28-year-old woman who just got her master's degree and is playing the field while praying for a future partner—and I honestly feel that I'm addicted to sex. It just naturally seeps into my thoughts no matter what I'm doing, even at the most inappropriate times. When I envision my future partner, he's just as much of a freak as I am! Are there other men and women out there who feel the same things?—T.G., Bangor, Maine*

A: We are all so much alike! The details may vary, but the root questions are pretty much the same: *Am I normal? Am I worthy of being loved?* Based on what you describe, the answer to both those questions is "Hell yes!" But if you're worried about your relationship with sex, ask yourself these questions: Is my sex drive in conflict with local laws? Has my sex drive blatantly impeded my progress in other areas of life? Is my sex drive often a point of moral contention in my relationships? If you answered yes to any of these, it might be a good idea to speak to a licensed professional—not because you're an addict per se but because balance isn't easy. If you answered no to all three, and you find that sex is by and large a joyful part of your life, just know that I've never met a single human being who claimed their sex life, libido, desires, opinions or beliefs were perfect. We are all trying to find love, make connections, grow, have some orgasms and make peace with ourselves (in no particular order). That said, there is absolutely a partner out there for you who can match your physical drive and meet your emotional qualifications; you just have to be intentional in finding him. As a woman who just completed her master's, you already get the formula: Know who you are, know where you fit best and immerse yourself in that community so you can align with like minds in the areas that matter to you the most.

Q: *I'm a man in his 30s and have been in a relationship with someone I deeply love for two years. I recently met another woman who's cool and works in the same industry as I do. We got together for coffee a couple of weeks after meeting, and we've been texting ever since—maybe it's just friendly, maybe it's a little bit flirty. I still haven't told her I have a girlfriend, and it's starting to feel weird. On one hand, I don't want to assume she likes me "that way." On the other, I feel I'm being dishonest with her and especially with my girlfriend. Where do I go from here?—S.P., Arlington Heights, Illinois*

A: First, know that scenarios like this will come up on both sides. I highly encourage you to discuss it with your partner, because at the end of the day, having a second person to navigate the complexities of life with is the joy of being in a relationship! Why is it that in romantic connections we accept that we have to share the undersides of our humanity (poop horror stories, credit drama, morning breath and all), but when it comes to our natural drive to desire and be desired by others, we all want our partners to believe we're superhuman? Well, as it turns out, you're not made of steel—so don't be afraid to admit that to your girlfriend and ask for guidance on how to manage both the situation and your feelings. As for the other woman, you already know the answer to this: Yeah, you should bring it up, but I also think your senses are correct. Instead of making it a cautionary statement, look for a casual way to insert it into the conversation.

Q: *I recently started dating a person who's transitioning and has bottom dysmorphia. They were born with female parts, and as a female I thought I would be able to better figure out their body, but it's daunting right now because they feel weird about their genitals, and I don't know how to navigate. How can I get to know my partner and their body in a way that will make us both feel comfortable?—J.M., Miami, Florida*

A: Congrats to your partner for making such an important decision, and also congrats to the two of you on your new connection. I'm going to remind you of something I'm certain you already know: Change is not easy, and it absolutely is not instant! Your partner may have spent 20-plus years feeling uncomfortable in their body or getting messages about their genitals that never aligned with their feelings—and as powerful as the decision to take ownership over their truth through transitioning is, it does not magically erase all those damaging, dysmorphic years. If it took them two decades to make the decision to change, they're allowed to take at least a third of that time to heal from the

The woman who has never had an orgasm or masturbated has likely not found her middle, because no one has ever invited her there.

dissonance they were surely feeling all that time. The good news is that though change isn't instant, if nurtured, it can be gradual. Through patience, positive affirmation and lots of communication, you should see an improvement in their attitude toward themselves, which will result in a better connection in the bedroom. Just remember that you should not expect a 180. Allow them to take the lead as much as possible. If you need a nudge, watch porn that turns both of you on and use it as a tool to discuss what you're comfortable and not comfortable exploring together.

Q: *My girlfriend and I (a man) have been together for three years, and I love her immensely, but due to a lack of activity, our sex life is not that great. She works as an exotic dancer, and I think this affects her views on sexual intimacy. When I try to talk about it with her, she mainly tells me what I want to hear or avoids the question altogether. I would like to break down that barrier and get her to be more open. I know this will be difficult because of the industry she works in—and I have chosen to accept that aspect—so how can I help our sex life progress?—R.U., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

A: With this attitude you're already 80 percent there; all you have to do is figure out the other 20 percent together. I would imagine that, as an exotic dancer, your girlfriend might have some difficulty untangling her sexual practices at work from those at home. At work she probably has two modes: one in which she portrays someone else's sexual fantasy and another in which she shuts down her sexuality to recenter herself. It sounds as though this mirrors how she treats conversations around intimacy, either saying what she thinks you want to hear or not speaking at all. My guess is she would like space to call the shots, to allow things to be her idea and to know that there is no expectation for anything other than her truth. This transition may take time and a lot of verbal affirmations along the way. As a starting point, I would suggest you learn her "turn-on triggers"—a system I created to help couples understand, beyond basic biological instigators, what gets their partner in the mood. The triggers are environmental (the five senses must be appeased, meaning the environment must be tidy and set), mental (e.g., a sapiosexual who requires a mental connection before a physical one), desire (direct language or actions that make someone feel wanted), cat-and-mouse (power play in which a partner likes to work for it or be worked for), negotiated (something else in addition to sex must be offered to sweeten the pot) and visual (attention to appearance is paramount). I have a quiz you both can take to learn what each other's triggers are: thegameofdesire.com/quiz. Try it out as a launching point.

Q: *What advice would you give a 20-something woman who has never had an orgasm because she can't rid herself of the idea that self-pleasure is bad or dirty? She doesn't know what she likes or even how to figure it out, which makes telling her partners what to do that much more difficult.—R.W., Toronto, Ontario*

A: I have seen this question many, many times. What that person needs more than anything else right now is patience with herself as opposed to a quick "get over it and get into it" fix. Years and years of sex-negative messaging are not that easy to erase! I am a person who has drenched herself in sex-positive content, and I still, at times, feel internally shamed. Instead of trying to ignore those feelings when they come up, I embrace them. I examine where they're coming from, I ask myself how credible the original source is, and I make tiny adjustments to my behavior so that I can work through my feelings—slowly. The woman who has never had an orgasm or masturbated has likely not found her middle, because no one has ever invited her there. Her past told her to deny her sexual self, and perhaps those in her present are pushing her to be totally liberated in her sexual pursuits. That's a big jump. I would suggest she ignore both, find her own true starting point and take it from there. And because this can never be said enough, I'd like to add that while it can seem as though the rest of the world is living in the land of milk and orgasms, women's pleasure researcher Elisabeth Lloyd, author of *The Case of the Female Orgasm*, has found that only 25 percent of women are consistently orgasmic during vaginal intercourse and about five percent *never* have orgasms. The path to pleasure is not linear for many women—all the more reason to take it slow and do it your way.

Q: *I'm in a monogamous relationship with the love of my life, but I've recently become attracted to someone else—a woman (like me)—whom I know well and have been interested in on and off since before this relationship. I've suggested polyamory, but my partner isn't onboard with that. What should I do?—G.S., Sausalito, California*

A: It sounds like what you need is an opportunity to explore this connection with your "someone else" without impinging



on your primary partnership. Interest and engagement are very different things. After spending more time with the other woman, the reasons the two of you never worked out may become clearer. On the flip side, maybe through this exploration you'll decide that she can actually improve all your relationships by allowing you to be in full, balanced expression. At that point I'd revisit the polyamory discussion with your partner. You may be looking for a free relationship—defined not by the rules or titles you chose in the beginning but by how each partner feels at any given time. The only thing constant in this world is change, and in a free relationship this isn't just your reality; it's your mantra. In order for this arrangement to thrive, you must be committed to hearing your partner's truths without constantly personalizing them. You acknowledge that your relationship is yours to experience, not to control. In short, when it comes to the rules of your relationship, you edit them often. And I suspect that right now what you need is a relationship that gives you space to flirt, connect and gain clarity.

Q: *I want to get straight to the point: How do I get women to like me? I'm a 28-year-old black male who's never been in a serious relationship or had vaginal intercourse. (I once paid a stripper to let me go down on her, but that's it.) I've tried dating apps and shooting my shot on Twitter, but I still get nothing. Am I doing something wrong? Am I just ugly? Am I doomed to a life of watching porn all the time and paying strippers?—P.S., Atlanta, Georgia*

A: I am so grateful for this question. It is vulnerable, authentic and relatable. And you are already on track to solve your dilemma, so all I'm going to do is point that awesome energy toward some action. I have a five-phase strategy you can use to make yourself a masterful connector. Here's the lightning-round version:

1. Get to know yourself. This does not mean take yourself on a long romantic walk; it means start identifying the core of who you are and how you tend to interact with others. I suggest doing the Big Five Personality Test and an attachment-theory quiz to start. Invest some time in studying emotional intelligence to help you master your interpersonal life. Next, take what you've learned and get feedback from others; after all, the mirror cannot see itself. Since you don't have an ex, ask a close friend or family member how you can improve as a connector, and if you sense they're giving you answers to support your ego versus your growth, tell them you can handle the truth—and you need it in order to move forward.

2. Change yourself. Those are triggering words, I know, but change is the only constant; all you're doing is taking ownership over the process. Based on what you've learned through your self-assessment, start making small intentional changes so that who you know yourself to be and how people perceive you are more aligned.

3. Learn from the greats. Once you've gotten good with you, start reading books or enlisting the help of experts to learn how to attract others. We're told that flirting, seduction, social intelligence, charisma, empathy, humor, strength and even attractiveness are traits we're simply born with, but in truth these are all skills that can be taught.

4. Practice, practice, practice. There's a reason pro athletes practice more than they play: If you can't do something when the stakes are low, you won't have a chance in hell of performing when pressure, nerves and clocks are in the mix. So learn to love socializing, start conversations with no agendas and be charming to everyone you meet. Not only will this make you a better dater; it will make your time on this planet more pleasant.

5. Set yourself up for success. Now that you're good with you and good with others, put yourself in environments that welcome, want and warrant the absolute best version of you.

EVERY.

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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

a candid conversation with hollywood's top-grossing actor (believe it) about racism, the joy of golf, the nightmare of crack and what it's like to act with yoda

Name the actor who has appeared in movie big movies in the Nineties: Hanks, Schwarzenegger, Cruise, Willis, Williams? The answer is none of the above. The distinction goes to Samuel L. Jackson, the most prolific African American actor in history—whose movies have earned a total of $1.2 billion this decade. And that doesn't count Jackson's latest film, Star Wars: The Phantom Menace, the first of the Star Wars prequels and the most eagerly anticipated film of the year.

Despite all those sold tickets, not to mention enough popcorn to fill the Grand Canyon, Jackson remains one of the most underrewarded actors in the movie business. Consider that Matthew McConaughey, who got his first big role opposite Jackson in the adaptation of John Grisham's A Time to Kill, now commanded $6 million a picture—a figure it took Jackson more than 15 years to achieve. And McConaughey hasn't had an Oscar lot since.

But that doesn't seem to bother Jackson, who is known to be a regular guy in a business of prima donnas. Instead of grumbling, Jackson is busy working—to his long and storied list of credits proves.

Perhaps none of Jackson's roles has made more of an impression than his portrayal of Jules Winnfield, the hit man in Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction. Dialogue with his murderous partner, played by John Travolta, and Jackson's recitations of Ezekiel 25:17 as prelude to his executions, are some of the most unforgettable moments in any movie. The role, created by Tarantino after the director saw Jackson's performance in Spike Lee's Jungle Fever, earned Jackson his first Oscar nomination. (The Academy Awards also did that year was also memorable. When he lost to Martin Landau's performance in Ed Wood, Jackson did what previous losers may have thought but never dared do on live TV. He said, "Shit." And we knew it because we read his lips.)

Besides Pulp Fiction, Jackson has appeared in a wide variety of movies (there have been more than 40 features in all) and rarely does he look the same. He played the earnest sidekick to Harrison Ford in Patriot Games, a reluctant sidekick to Bruce Willis in Die Hard With a Vengeance, a computer technician to Jurassic Park, an attorney in Losing Isaiah, a Don King–like promoter in The Great White Hype, a womanizing doctor in Eve's Bayou and a member of the Left-banana brief team in Goodfellas.

Auditioners like him and so do directors, many of whom call him back for subsequent films. He has been in four movies with Spike Lee, including Do the Right Thing, School Daze and Jungle Fever, and Tarantino followed up Pulp Fiction by casting him as Ordell Robbie in Jackie Brown. (That character—who repeatedly uses the word nigger—prompted a celebrated fallout between Lee and Jackson.) Benny Hanlin also called him back for encores in roles opposite Geena Davis in the raucous action film The Long Kiss Goodnight and then Deep Blue Sea. "I want Sam to be in every movie I make," says Hanlin. "Aside from being one of the best actors, he's respected by everyone on the set. When you have to get your cast to stand in cold water for hours, shooting a scene over and over, it's much easier when they see Sam doing it and never complaining." Says Joel Schumacher, director of A Time To Kill: "Sam can be sitting around joking, but when you say, 'Action,' he becomes the most intense and focused actor. I've never seen anyone with the facility to transform himself that quickly."

Jackson had a modest upbringing in segregated Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he was raised by his mother, Elizabeth, his grandparents and an aunt. His father abandoned the family and quit the Army so he wouldn't have to pay child support. Father and son did not meet again until Jackson was grown—it was not a storybook reunion.

As a child, Jackson enjoyed movies and TV and was a voracious reader. In high school he swam competitively, ran hurdles on the track team, played horn in the marching band and was senior class president.

"This business is about money. An actor's job is to get butts in the seats. So when they want a big-name white guy, I understand it. But there's still an element that wants to hold down the number of ethnic people."

"I didn't know any other way to perform than being high. My friends and I would go to the theater, get dressed, put on makeup and smoke a reefer and drink wine. I've done plays on acid and everything else."

"Bad guys are people, too. Most people think that if you're playing a killer, you've got to be emotionless. But killers have kids at home. They watch TV and play with their kids and help them do their homework."

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

DAVID BOWIE

an outrageous conversation with the actor, rock singer and sexual switch-hitter

He was once a scruffy, honey-haired folk singer. Then the foppish leader of a Beatles-prototype pop band, The Buzz. Then an adamantly bisexual balladeer. Then a spacy, cropped-red-haired androgynous guitarist backed by a band called the Spiders from Mars. Then a soul singer. Then a movie actor . . . and finally, a smartly conservative, Sinatra-esque entertainer. David Bowie, it's safe to say, would do anything to make it. And now that he has made it, he'll do anything to stay there.

At 29, David Bowie (born David Jones in Brixton, England) is far more than another rock star. He is a self-designed media manipulator who knows neither tact nor intimidation. There is but one objective to his bizarrely eclectic career—attention. Without it, he would surely wither and die. Before a crowd of paying customers, if possible.

In April 1975, Bowie splashily announced he had given up on rock. "I've rocked my roll," is the way he put it. "It's a boring dead end. There will be no more rock-'n'-roll records or tours from me. The last thing I want to be is some useless fucking rock singer." That was the second time he'd made such a statement. He had first announced a rock retirement during his encore at a huge outdoor London concert in 1973, after which he went on to release "Diamond Dogs" and to book a three-month American tour.

This time, Bowie ate his words of farewell even more spectacularly. Last November, he arranged an interview by satellite from his Los Angeles home with England's most popular talk-show host, Russell Harty, to explain that he had a new album of double-fisted rock 'n' roll, "Station to Station." What's more, Bowie rambled on, he would soon be embarking on a six-month world-wide concert blitz. The government of Spain, meanwhile, demanded emergency use of the satellite to tell the world that Generalissimo Franco had died. Bowie, always the bad boy, refused to give it up.

Bowie is not the most loved man in the music business. Still, he has made his mark. When he first appeared on an American stage, in 1972, he was humping his guitarist, wearing full make-up and sporting lavishly feminine costumes. He instantly created a new genre—glamor rock—that yanked rock out of its innocence. Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones, Elton John, Alice Cooper, Todd Rundgren, Lou Reed and a host of glitter bands, such as Queen, Roxy Music, Slade, T. Rex and Cockney Rebel, followed suit.

Once Bowie had turned everybody's head on that first U. S. tour, it wasn't long before his then-current LP about a doomed rock demigod, "The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars," shot to the top of the charts. His three previous albums—all stiffs in their day—began selling wildly. The press leaped to proclaim Bowie the Next Big Thing we'd all been craving since the demise of the Beatles. Just as quickly, it turned to attack the phenomenon. There was, it seemed, something about Bowie's bisexual band wagon that wasn't quite . . . healthy.

Musicians and critics banded together to revolt against Bowie's decadence. But Bowie had already assumed a new, equally ludicrous façade—disco soul. Suddenly, this frail, faggy hard rocker was bumping and grinding out rhythm-and-blues. And it worked. Bowie rocked up two huge hits, "Young Americans" and "Fame." Then came the ultimate acceptance: He became one of the very few whites ever to be invited to appear on "Soul Train."

To accommodate the wide base of his success, Bowie has since assumed the



ANDY KENT

"Girls are always presuming I've kept my heterosexual virginity. So I've had all these girls try to get me over to the other side again: 'C'mon, David, it isn't all that bad.' I always play dumb."



CINEMA 6

"The only thing that shocks now is an extreme. Like me running my mouth off, jacking myself off. Unless you do that, nobody will pay attention to you. You have to hit them on the head."



ANDY KENT

"Adolf Hitler was one of the first rock stars. Look at some of his films and see how he moved. I think he was quite as good as Jagger. The world will never see his like. He staged a country."

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

BILLIE JEAN KING

a candid conversation with the contentious superstar of women's tennis

If, in these days of raised female consciousness, someone were to write a liberated version of the old "hard-working boy makes good" stories, he could find a ready-made model in the sports world's first genuine woman superstar. Billie Jean King is a living testimonial to the tradition that anyone of modest background who has talent, wants something badly enough and is willing to work his or her ass off can be successful. She's the best-known women tennis player in the world—and the richest; she's becoming a dynamic sports promoter; and she's soon launching a new career in television.

Billie Jean was born November 22, 1943, in Long Beach, California. She was a perfect child. "Just a little angel," says her mother, Betty Moffitt. But she hated doing the accepted little-girl things, preferring instead to spend her time in the back yard, playing catch with her father, Bill, now a 31-year veteran with the Long Beach Fire Department. To make ends meet, Moffitt moonlighted at nights in a plastics factory and Betty rang neighborhood doorbells as an Avon lady and was a Tupperware saleswoman. When Billie Jean was four, her father, who couldn't afford to buy her a baseball bat, scrounged up a piece of wood and carved one.

Billie Jean developed fast, and for several years was the biggest kid in her class in school. By the time she was ten, she was a real tomboy—though that's a word she'd like to see stricken from our vocabulary. She loved to play football in front of the family home, especially if she could carry the ball. She never had a race at the women's picnic, beating all comers—boys and girls alike. She played basketball and was shortstop on a girls' softball team, on which she was the youngest player. Even today, she recalls with pride one game in which she made a shoestring catch off a leaping line drive, spun and threw to third to double off a runner—making the game in the final inning. She was walked when she came off the field. It was her first taste of public adulation—and she loved it. She still does.

But the Moffitts weren't keen on raising a bullyboy or a shoestring. One day her mother abruptly ended Billie Jean's football career—on the ground that it wasn't ladylike. Billie Jean asked her father what sport a girl could enter. Moffitt thought for a while, and finally suggested swimming—at tennis.

"What's tennis?" asked Billie Jean.

"Well, you run a lot and hit a ball," her father said. "I think you'll like it."

Billie Jean liked it. She did odd jobs for neighbors, raising a quarter here, 50 cents there; her parents chipped in and she bought a nice new racket with maroon nylon strings and a maroon handle, for eight dollars. From the day of her first tennis lesson, in the Long Beach public parks, tennis has been her whole life—almost to the exclusion of everything else.

"A few days after her first tennis game," her mother recalls, "Sister"—that's the family name for Billie Jean—"came home to tell her father and me, 'I am going to be the best woman tennis player in the world.' We took her at her word. She was and is the kind of girl who means what she says."

Every moment she was not in school Billie Jean spent on the courts or in the back yard, banging a tennis ball against an old wooden fence. Finally, she literally demolished it, so her father built a new one for her out of concrete blocks—and set up a spotlight to allow her to keep on practicing after dark.

When she was 15, Billie Jean—as Billie Jean, as the sportswriters called her—won her first big tennis tournament. Three years later, she became the youngest person ever to win a doubles championship at Wimbledon, the shrine of world tennis—and the place where she would go on to take 18 titles in singles, doubles and mixed doubles.

While attending Los Angeles State College, Billie Jean met Larry King, a handsome blond prelaw student one year her junior. After a two-year courtship, interrupted constantly by the demands of her burgeoning tennis career, Larry proposed



"I realize now that being number one isn't glamorous. It's more like being the fastest gun in the West. You can never let up, because you have to prove yourself against all comers."



"People want realism, and sports provide that. When they see interviews, or on TV, is rehearsed, edited, cut. They are not accepting my guts out, missing the ball and getting angry. That's real."



"I don't like to win against men. But there are young women on the staff of our magazine who say, 'Oh, I love to beat my boyfriend, because he gets so upset.' Well, now, that's got to be a mistake."

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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR

A candid conversation with the unbreakable newswoman on everything from immigration to #MeToo, the power of the press to the dawn of her "sexy 60s"

An impeachment scandal is in full swing, and attacks on the press erupt almost daily from the White House. The year, of course, is 1973.

In his *Playboy Interview* from that year, legendary CBS anchor Walter Cronkite was "visibly steamed" by a question about the Nixon administration—which at that time was halfway between the Watergate break-in and the president's resignation—and its war on the news media. The fatherly newsman gave a strident critique of what he called a "well-directed campaign against the press, agreed upon in secret by members of the administration."

In 2019, another American president has declared war on the free press and is facing impeachment. But today's most venerated defender of newsmen's rights is not a newsman at all: It's Christiane Amanpour, the British Iranian war reporter turned CNN and PBS host. Crisp, elegant and unshakably poised, Amanpour uses her nightly CNN International show to delve into global affairs, interrogate newsmakers and occasionally rip to pieces the lies and obfuscations uttered by the world's most powerful men. Amanpour began her reporting career in a world just introduced to 24-hour news coverage, and even in an age of fake news and overflowing Twitter time lines she remains our guide across borders worldwide.

Born in London to a British Catholic mother and a much older Iranian Muslim father, Amanpour spent a charmed childhood in Tehran, riding Arabian stallions and skiing through the winter. At 11, she was sent to a British convent school; she would remain in the English educational system through high school. By the time she enrolled at the University of Rhode Island to study journalism, Iran was in the throes of a revolution. The Amanpour family fled to England, starting anew in a cramped flat. For the nascent journalist of the family, that historical moment marked a turning point. "I knew what I wanted to do," she said in a 2013 Mediabistro interview. "I wanted to be a foreign correspondent."

Starting out at Providence, Rhode Island's NBC affiliate, Amanpour soon heard about a new network called CNN. It was a ragtag place, she was told, where they might be more amenable to an olive-toned British-accented woman reporting the news. She made the switch, and Christiane Amanpour as we know her was born.



"Frankly, the press has been part of the problem by thinking that objectivity means neutrality or false equivalence."



"There are hundreds of millions of women around the world who don't dare imagine that they have a right just to be happy."



"I'm pretty middle-of-the-road in most of my views except when it comes to genocide and climate truths."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRISTELLE DE CASTRO**

Name a major conflict of the past 30 years, and Amanpour reported from it. Operation Desert Storm was her first, but she truly cut her teeth covering the Balkans, where her sense of moral outrage mounted as she watched Serb atrocities and the targeting of her friends and colleagues. Reporting the news, she concluded in Bosnia, requires accuracy and proportionality, not simplistic both-sidesism—an ethical code she has since called "truthful, not neutral."

That ethos has served her well as she's interviewed petulant leaders and seldom-questioned strongmen—she had an exclusive sit-down with soon-to-be-ousted Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in the midst of the revolution in Cairo, was among the last journalists to interview Libya's Moammar Gadhafi and was once told to "be quiet" by Yasir Arafat before he hung up on her—and shapes her approach to the Trump era. It has also made her a credible voice in the age of #MeToo: She's a reporter for whom feminism is a simple commitment to equality, not an extremist takeover that threatens to destroy due process. And it makes her a fitting replacement for Charlie Rose, a man felled by his alleged predation on and harassment of younger women, and in whose place *Amanpour & Company* now airs on PBS.

In 1998 she married former U.S. assistant secretary of state James Rubin; two years later she had their son, Darius, at the age of 42. Now, at 61 and recently divorced after 20 years of marriage, Amanpour is opening a new chapter she calls her "sexy 60s." That storyline started in familiar territory: reporting. Her six-episode series *Sex & Love Around the World* premiered on Netflix in 2018, revealing Amanpour as a winning and surprisingly cheeky chronicler of female lust, pleasure and desire.



Amanpour sat down with journalist (and freelance CNN.com columnist) **Jill Filipovic** for PLAYBOY in Amanpour's office at CNN's London headquarters, where a sign on the door, illustrated with an AK-47, reads PROHIBIT ENTRANCE WITH WEAPON. Filipovic reports, "Christiane Amanpour has little patience for theoretical musings about the state of journalism or feminism, and even less for armchair critics who haven't done the work or taken the risks. More than once she engaged with a question of mine before rejecting it, but even in her dismissals she was thorough and illuminating. Just sitting in her office—lined with trophies, a framed picture of her son atop her crowded desk—you can imagine she would remain collected and steely even when bullets are flying. You walk away holding her in tremendous esteem and, not that she'd give a damn, liking her a lot—even when she calls you out on the first sentence of your interview."

PLAYBOY: The president of the United States has called reporters scum and slime.
AMANPOUR: I cannot *believe* you started with the president of the United States.
PLAYBOY: Going for it, you know? He has targeted CNN in particular as a purveyor of fake news. Public trust in the media is at an all-time low in the United States. You've made a career out of telling some of the world's most important stories. What do you make of this moment for press freedom and the role of journalism in society?
AMANPOUR: The president has been very clear from the beginning that the strategy is to delegitimize whoever he thinks is an opponent, whether it's the press, a foreign leader, the chairman of the Federal Reserve—whoever seems to stand in his way. That's his thing. Our job is to not accept that framing from anybody who seeks to delegitimize the free, independent, democratically protected press. I have a platform to bring the truth, to bring evidence, to bring stories, to bring what's really happening in the world and in the United States to the audience. I think the rest of it is up to the audience. They now have responsibility.
PLAYBOY: But lots of viewers aren't taking that on; many are simply seeking out publications and television shows that confirm their prior beliefs. Are viewers the ones who are abdicating their civic responsibility?
AMANPOUR: There are a lot of people who believe the conspiracy theories and the lies that are told about us or about what's going on in the world. But I notice the backlash to all these lies and conspiracy theories, and I appreciate the fact that our ratings are up, readership is up, subscription is up for real truth-telling platforms. I'm not a Pollyanna. I don't think we're out of danger. I think, though, that those of us who have been doing this for a long time, who are experienced and know where the truth lies, have a responsibility to stand up for the truth—even in public, even if it's unpopular.
PLAYBOY: You've risked your life for stories. Friends and colleagues of yours have given their lives to bring us the news. Just on a visceral human level, how does it feel when you hear the president of the United States call reporters slime?
AMANPOUR: I haven't heard the word *slime,* but I'm hurt and obviously offended when I hear an absolutely vital

pillar of democracy and civil society being trashed from within. But it also redoubles my commitment to fighting against it. I know firsthand the danger of living in a world where lies are portrayed as facts. For me, the difference between truth and lies is the difference between freedom and democracy and dictatorship. So I'm very troubled by this. But I'd still love to interview President Trump.

PLAYBOY: There's a debate roiling the press right now about how to cover the president's lies—or those of anyone who comes face-to-face with journalists and spreads absolute falsities. How much airtime do you give that?

AMANPOUR: You don't. You counter it. The concept of fake news is not something Donald Trump invented. Others might have called it propaganda. Just in fairly recent history, the Soviet Union was a master of this. The Soviets, now the Russians—that's their war by other means. That's how they fight to keep dominance in their sphere. We've got plenty of experience, we in this free press, and we know how to counter it. We just have to do that without getting hysterical, overly despondent and overly emotional.

PLAYBOY: *The New Yorker* and Errol Morris both got in hot water for interviewing or planning to interview Steve Bannon. The argument was essentially that he's a propagandist, not someone whose voice should be amplified, which exemplified the idea of de-platforming. Is there anyone you would never interview or have on your show?

AMANPOUR: Right now I refuse to have climate deniers on my show. I will not have people who deny scientific evidence. I'm very much wedded to the concept of fact-based, evidence-based empirical truth. People who say it doesn't exist are just equivocating and are relativists. Frankly, the press has been part of the problem by thinking that objectivity means neutrality or false equivalence. It no more means that when we're discussing climate and science than it does when we're talking about genocide and ethnic cleansing. When you pretend you're being objective by equating unequal facts and unequal moralities, you're not telling the truth. You're telling lies. In the worst case, you're an accomplice to the worst results of that.

PLAYBOY: But how do you navigate moral outrage in a place where you don't know the culture very well, where you're an outsider?

AMANPOUR: I hope this doesn't sound arrogant, but I've grown up all over the world. I've traveled all over the world. I grew up in a patriarchal society with a Muslim father and a Catholic mother—an Iranian father, a British mother. I was taught from a very young age about the morals we learn first and foremost through our religious upbringing, whether it's Christian, Jewish, Muslim or whatever. Thou shall not kill. Respect your father and your mother. Thou shall not lie. All those things we grow up with form the basis of a moral platform. It's true that I don't know the ins and outs of every single culture, but I've learned a lot over the 30 years I've traveled the world examining people's cultures. I learn as I go. But I don't consider my reporting to be some kind of moral diatribe; I look to the humanity of every situation. I see people in every story I cover, people with lives and loves and stories to tell who aren't just statistics in war or famine or whatever political crisis they might be caught up in.

I have no time for this conversation about whether we should or shouldn't be there.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever felt that the push to find truth in a complicated situation and not be focused on neutrality has taken you away from your obligations as a reporter?

AMANPOUR: Never. I challenge anybody to produce any piece of my reporting they think fits that description. Never. Which is not to say I got everything right all the time. One of the things I like about going places and spending a long time there is that the story comes into focus ever more sharply. I've never presumed to be an expert from day one on the ground. I've always said that the first stories you see will inevitably be pretty simple. The longer you're there, the more the layers will manifest themselves.

PLAYBOY: One criticism of foreign correspondence as a field is that it's neocolonial: Foreign correspondents go in, extract news from poorer countries and run stories that are simplistic or sensational or that simply portray other cultures as backward and in need of saving. Is there a diversity problem in international reporting?

AMANPOUR: Do I think there should be more diversity? One hundred percent. Do I think there should be more gender equity? Do I think there should be diversity in every level of news coverage, and in every level of global society? Yes, I absolutely do. But do I apologize? Certainly not. If we didn't do it, who would? The typical complaint comes from armchair warriors sitting at home in their pajamas, tweeting, instagramming and facebooking from 10,000 miles away. Tell me, which is worse? That's a whole lot worse than those of us who get up and go there and find the stories.

PLAYBOY: I think there are two arguments. One would be that it's unbalanced: How many Africans are in the White House press corps? The other is that publications like *The New York Times* and networks like CNN should be relying more on local journalists to cover their own nations.

AMANPOUR: I think this criticism is crap, if you want my honest opinion. As I said, what is the other option? Furthermore, things are changing, and I think that criticism is out-of-date. I think my profession was instrumental in turning around the West's indifference to Bosnia and then to Kosovo. We helped spur our democracies to intervene, to stop a genocidal slaughter in Europe and therefore save their own dignities and standings as well as lives on the ground. That's a good thing. We did that, and I'm proud of it. We might have had that impact had we been en masse in Syria, but we weren't, because ISIS was beheading people, starting with poor James Foley. And so we were not able to go there. Who did we rely on? Syrians, Syrian journalists. They told the story of their war.

PLAYBOY: At great personal risk.

AMANPOUR: At great personal risk and with great professionalism. I ask myself, what would Obama have done if the same press corps that was in Bosnia in the 1990s had been in Syria, telling the same human stories day after day and making it impossible for our democracies to turn their heads in the face of wanton slaughter and wholesale violation of all the values and policies the West says it not only upholds but seeks to promote around the world? It's a terrible realization that we failed in Syria. The Syrian journalists did a great job, but we failed. The Trump administration is now pulling out American forces, and ISIS is not defeated.

We failed in Rwanda. We didn't go to Rwanda because, if I'm not mistaken, the African and the Western press were focused on the good-news story of Nelson Mandela's election in South Africa, a fantastic story. They were focused on O.J. Simpson in the United States. And in three months, 800,000 to 1 million black people were slaughtered in Rwanda. That's a huge burden to bear. What I'm saying is that I have no time for this conversation about whether we should or shouldn't be there.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of things you might have no time for, you're one of the most famous female journalists in the world. What are you sick of getting asked about being a woman in this field?

AMANPOUR: Oh, that's interesting. What am I sick of getting asked? "What does it mean to be a woman in this field?" More and more women have joined this particular profession as foreign correspondents, in front of the camera, behind the camera, on shows and the like. That's a huge change from when I started out in 1990. But until we have more women at the top of news organizations, there will still be an issue—not with how women are represented but how the world is represented.

Treating women equally is not just a human right or a charity. If women as well as men in our work were determining what stories were going to be covered so there wasn't such a massive imbalance, eventually you would get a different look at the world. Women have made a big difference in how we cover the world—and I think our male colleagues have learned from us—because in addition to covering the bang-bang and the hardware and all of that, our natural instinct is that everyone has a human story. The thing I've learned throughout my career, and I guess from my childhood, is that we're all very similar. We all, wherever we come from, have the same hopes, the same dreams, the same desires. And we need to emphasize that more and more, because there's a sense these days—especially with nationalism, populism and anti-immigration, whether it's in the United States, parts of Europe or elsewhere—that somehow there is a group of people who are less than human, who are really scary, who would do us harm, who would, if we let them in, somehow destroy our countries. It's not borne out by the facts, and it's sad that today those thoughts and those politics are still being perpetrated. Too many political leaders are appealing to the fear factor rather than to the hope factor.

What am I sick of getting asked? "What does it mean to be a woman in this field?"

PLAYBOY: Give me an example: When have you covered a story differently?

AMANPOUR: In my coverage of the war in Bosnia I almost never went to the briefings at the beginning, and I didn't do the politics. I remember telling stories of what it was like as an ordinary person to be caught in a medieval siege from 1992 all the way through the 1990s until the war was stopped. The first winter, I'll never forget, professors, engineers, scientists, artists were cutting down trees for wood, burning their books for heat, picking grass and herbs from the central islands along Sniper Alley, just trying to survive.

PLAYBOY: Your personal and professional lives have hinged on migration and movement. What perspective do you wish Americans had on the immigration debate? How could we be thinking about it differently?

AMANPOUR: First and foremost it is absolutely true that over many, many years the United States administrations and Congress have failed to implement a rational immigration-reform process, program or set of laws. They've just failed. What we're seeing is a whole load of ad hoc policies that are made with a huge amount of short-termism that then affect real human beings. So I think one story that's not told enough about the Southern border of the United States is the push factor: What is causing people to get up and take that very dangerous route by foot, many with their families, to come from Central America or wherever it might be to try to find refuge? The economic and environmental fallout there is not being told.

People wish to stay in their own countries if they can. That's the one thing I've learned from traveling and covering war and refugees. It's not as if everybody's dying to suddenly leave their countries and come to the U.S. Most people who come are forced to by crime, war, famine, dictatorship or lack of freedom in their own countries. They would rather stay where they are. That's why, to me, it would seem that the best foreign policy of a nation is not only to keep itself and its economy and standing in the world secure but also to do its utmost not to close its borders and hunker down; a nation needs to do what it can to make other parts of the world livable. I wish leaders could look a bit more broadly at what would really prevent a mass influx of people seeking basic safety and freedom and something to eat.

PLAYBOY: So I have this quote from you. In Sheila Weller's book *The News Sorority,* you say, "All my energy, my emotion, my intellect went into my work. During the '90s, people would ask me, 'When are you going to settle down?' And I'd say, 'I don't think I'll ever have a child.' " And then you did. What changed?

AMANPOUR: What changed is that I felt I needed to humanize myself a little. Actually it was pretty funny. One of my producers, Robert Wiener, was instrumental in CNN's coverage of Baghdad during the war. He once said to me, "So, Christiane, what are you going to do,



snuggle up with all your awards? Don't you think you need to get serious about your personal life?" I suddenly started to think about it, and I said, "Yeah, maybe I should focus a little bit more on my personal life and see what happens." And I did. I started to make myself more open. I'd had great love affairs in the field, on the road, but I was absolutely committed to my career and to the stories. I could not have done what I did had I had the responsibility to stay alive and to keep leaving the field and going home. I couldn't have done it, end of story. I didn't really think about my own safety. You're young, you think you're immortal, you don't necessarily have anybody to stay alive for. You're balls to the wall. You're doing the job and you're loving it. So I was a late starter in that regard. I had my kid at 42, and it is literally the joy of my life. But I can tell you one thing: As soon as I had my child, I suddenly started to feel more nervous about going overseas, about going to war zones, about maybe succumbing, like so many of my friends and colleagues had done.

PLAYBOY: I don't mean to sound insensitive, but why have a kid then?

AMANPOUR: Well, it's a good question. To be honest, I didn't necessarily think I *had* to have a kid, but I cannot imagine my life as rich as it has been since I've had my kid. Nothing in the world will match what my child means to me. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

But fast-forward now to these young kids. I had a 26-year-old young man on my show recently, a member of Extinction Rebellion, who, like many millennials, are asking themselves if they're going to have children. Are they going to be able to bring children into this world we've created for them through our wanton short-termism and greed? That's a whole different existential crisis than we had in my generation. Would I have a kid? Well, for me the question was could I still be a professional. Today the question is whether it's moral to bring a child into this world. These are tough issues our young people are wrestling with.

PLAYBOY: Your show replaced Charlie Rose's on PBS after he was sacked for sexual harassment. He's just one of a long list of men whose behavior has gotten them removed from their positions as part of the #MeToo movement.

AMANPOUR: And all of them still deny it.

PLAYBOY: You told *Variety* that you don't think the pendulum has swung too far. It's a question everyone's being asked: "Has #MeToo gone too far?" You said no. But you also said we can't have a one-size-fits-all solution to these issues.

AMANPOUR: Correct, and those are not two opposing thoughts. Do I think it's gone too far? The answer for me is categorically no. This movement has completely changed the dynamic of the world. It's not perfect. It's not that now every woman is safe or every woman has a clear path up in her career or every woman can get the truth out. That's not the case. What it has done is shift in an irreversible way the expectations around what women have been forced to endure in silence. It has shifted entirely the notion of consent. I believe that in order to really change this, men have to be involved in the solutions. And I say that because I'm a feminist, because I'm the mother of a boy and I want my boy to grow up in a safe, consensual society, hand in hand with women, and because I believe this world will never get any better unless in every level of society men and women are on equal footing and working together.

How much luckier can I get? Seriously—it's not a rhetorical question.

PLAYBOY: So outside of the most obvious criminal cases that should be dealt with by the justice system, what does a solution look like?

AMANPOUR: Obviously crimes have been committed. We should not have people protecting themselves by having their lawyers or lobbyists or whoever they are getting victims to sign nondisclosure agreements, forcing people to accept pittances as payoffs or payouts. We should hold the serious offenders accountable, 100 percent. But not every action is a criminal action. And not every action is the same. I think a huge amount of effort and accountability can be meted out without necessarily firing or destroying somebody's life.

But much like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa or those kinds of post-conflict resolutions, it requires all sides—in this case all genders—to work together. It requires those whose wrongdoing is less than a criminal wrongdoing to fess up, to work with whoever they need to work with on whatever level to atone. Some people have perhaps been accused unfairly, and we need to be very aware of that, because we're not going to have a solid foundation for this movement if it looks like it's unfair and just a witch hunt.

PLAYBOY: One thing feminists emphasize about this movement is that, though we talk about sexual harassment, it's really not about sex; it's about power.

AMANPOUR: *And* sex.

PLAYBOY: And it's about the ways in which sexually harassing women are more than just "it makes us feel bad." It's that it systematically pushes us out of opportunities and out of particular fields. So is part of the solution to replace the men who have done wrong with women?

AMANPOUR: Well, listen, you're going to ask me because that's my case. Charlie Rose does not accept these accusations. You have to put his perspective in it as well. But I can say only this: I am absolutely thrilled and I think it's a great statement that a woman has taken this job at this particular time. I'm not just a token woman. I'm a woman who has risen through the ranks and hopefully proved my competence, my integrity and my lack of compromise on those issues. So I think it's completely and utterly apt. The amount of feedback I've had from women absolutely confirms that for me. Actually, I don't even think it should be a question. I think women have proved themselves over and over again, and the notion that we should be grateful for any tidbits or crumbs or pairing with anybody else is ancient history. What irritates me is that when people of privilege complain about, let's say, a woman getting this job, they're complaining about

the field being level. That's all. And that's not acceptable. We have to have a level playing field now.

PLAYBOY: The #MeToo observation I've found most resonant comes from Rebecca Traister in *New York* magazine: "In hearing these individual tales, we're not only learning about individual trespasses, but for the first time getting a view of the matrix in which we've all been living. We see that the men who have had the power to abuse women's bodies and psyches throughout their careers are in many cases also the ones in charge of our political and cultural stories." How do you think it changes the dynamic to have women like you now in a position of telling our political and cultural stories?

AMANPOUR: First and foremost, the ultimate contradiction to all of these accusations against Harvey Weinstein is that he's been accused of some very serious criminal wrongdoing and misconduct against women, and yet he produced some great films. There's no doubt about it; our cultural environment might have been poorer without those films. But the point you're making is correct. If we accept that our society's story will be told by only one gender, it's not the whole story. That's what we're still struggling for. It will take decades, if not centuries, more. And whoever's in a position of power, privilege and entitlement lets go of it with great difficulty. What they need to know is that most of us are not looking to overtake and dominate; we want to share in the telling of our personal and global narrative, or our historical narrative won't be told accurately.

PLAYBOY: I don't work in many conflict zones, but I do work in humanitarian crisis zones. One of the more jarring things for me is coming home from a crisis and having a nice bottle of wine and dinner in a beautiful restaurant. It so deeply highlights the random luck of being born in one place or another. How do you navigate that contrast, and does it ever get easier to be in the places you work and then come back to a beautiful home in London?

AMANPOUR: I remember very strongly the first times I came out of the siege of Sarajevo to take a break. I would come out for maybe a couple of weeks and then be there for several months and then come out again for a couple of weeks, et cetera. I remember deep feelings of guilt when I left. I thought it was just me, but now I know it's very common. I don't even think it's *post*-traumatic stress disorder; it's stress-of-the-moment disorder, when you leave whoever it is behind, in whatever nightmare scenario you've all been in together, and feel guilty for them, for their basic physical safety. You think you're deserting the cause, so to speak. You're deserting colleagues, friends, people, the story.

I've had those feelings and I've pushed the limits of getting people out of the siege of Sarajevo. I did things that I would have been in deep, deep trouble for had it been known at the time. I used every means possible to extract some very vulnerable people from Sarajevo. It wasn't allowed, but I did it along with my team members, and I'm pleased and proud of that.

PLAYBOY: Whom did you extract?

AMANPOUR: I extracted a husband, wife and their kid and made up all sorts of stories as to why they had to be processed through the official lines, get on a military flight, get out, come to the United States, et cetera. I even said the kid worked for a kids' program on CNN. It was only mildly stretching the truth. In any event, I saved their lives, we saved their lives, and I have nothing to apologize for. Again, what's the alternative? Our oath, or mine, is do no harm. I don't feel the necessity not to come home and have a glass of wine and see my friends and family. In fact, I believe that kept me sane and that I could, like many people, have been driven completely mad had I stayed there the entire time with no break. And then what good would I have been? What story would I have told? I would have been totally compromised. One of my proudest accomplishments is that I emerged sane from all these horrendous things I've seen.

PLAYBOY: Were there ever moments when you felt you'd crossed over, that you were at a point where you were mentally unwell?

AMANPOUR: Nope. Never. Certainly not at the time and not since, but I think it's an important question, because there are degrees thereof. Some people are much more affected, some people less. Some people are obviously affected, some people hide it. I think mental health is an issue we absolutely have to talk about. And we are, more and more and more. I credit CNN and all the news organizations that very early on in the Bosnian war and certainly after 9/11 realized they were sending their employees into the worst, most extreme experiences of the human condition, and that it will have an effect.

There's no doubt I've been affected. And I would say that sometimes I'm very stressed, sometimes I'm anxious, sometimes I can maybe talk loudly or whatever. I put it all down to the effects of what I went through. I'm not ashamed. I don't have screaming PTSD, but I certainly have...I don't know. I don't even know how to describe it.

PLAYBOY: A normal human reaction?

AMANPOUR: It's a normal human reaction, but you know what? It's to an abnormal human experience. Not only what happens to us, but to watch what's happening to the people we're covering. It's inhuman what we've had to witness. And that's why I make no apologies for any of us who go and do it. You can be white, you can be rich, you can be poor, you can be any other color. But go and tell the stories and tell them honestly and bring back the information.

PLAYBOY: How did you not burn out?

AMANPOUR: I think because I came back enough, but also I obviously have a huge amount of stamina, mental and physical. I am a very optimistic person. I have faith. I was always in the warm embrace of my family and friends. And that's what I would return to. I would come back to my family and friends and just try to have as normal and as beautiful a life as I could. I would go to museums, go to good films, go to lovely gardens with beautiful plantings. I would gravitate toward beauty, and it was an antidote. I knew early on—even if I didn't know, I knew subconsciously—that I had to come back and do things that would cauterize the wounds.

PLAYBOY: You've been described many times as having nerves of steel, but there must be moments when you're absolutely terrified.

AMANPOUR: Yeah.

PLAYBOY: What were some of those moments when you felt the most frightened, and how did you navigate that?

AMANPOUR: I'd never really been in a war zone before Bosnia. I mean, yes, there was the first Gulf war, but that was much more about big armies facing off against each other. It was much more of a set piece, though it was pretty scary when we were in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's whim. But to be in Bosnia in a medieval siege with indiscriminate shelling of civilians—and we were obviously among the civilians; we didn't have a special journalistic safe haven somewhere—was very scary when I first encountered it. And then you just develop a certain awareness. I always touch wood and say

I'm very lucky. Many of my friends and colleagues were not so lucky. You can't allow those fears and those emotions in the moment to paralyze you. It's only afterward that you realize what you've been through, perhaps the crazy risks you've taken. The whole way through the war, it wasn't that I wasn't afraid; it was that I managed the fear.

PLAYBOY: Are you a person of faith?

AMANPOUR: Yeah.

PLAYBOY: Can you tell me more about that?

AMANPOUR: Not really. I mean, it's nothing huge. I was brought up Catholic by my mother, and I went to a Catholic convent. As I said at the beginning, that whole early childhood education formed my human and moral view of the world. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is the basic golden rule, isn't it, of Christianity? I'm not an extremist. I'm pretty middle-of-the-road in most of my views except when it comes to genocide and climate truths.

PLAYBOY: But you're also a feminist, right?

AMANPOUR: Oh, I'm definitely a feminist, but that's middle-of-the-road.

PLAYBOY: But the church is not exactly middle-of-the-road.

AMANPOUR: No, it's not. So those are issues. When I have interviews with church leaders, for instance, I go very deep into that. I always bring up the issue of women in the Catholic Church

PLAYBOY: Is that a challenge personally? Not to do your job, but to reconcile your faith with some of what the church does?

AMANPOUR: No, no, no. Who I worry about offending is my mother, who watches. But for me, it's an absolute no-brainer. I'm sorry my faith has so much to account for and to atone for, but you know what? All faiths do.

PLAYBOY: It sounds like you're in a pretty fabulous professional place right now, but you told British *Vogue* that you're thinking of putting yourself back out in the field again. "It's time for my third act," you said. In your dream universe, what's the third act?

AMANPOUR: I don't yet know what my third act is. I'm on the cusp certainly in my chronological life. I'm not sure how it's going to manifest. What I do know is that I love being in the field, not necessarily under fire, but doing things like *Sex & Love Around the World*. I really enjoyed that, because even though it had that title, it wasn't about the seedy underbelly of sex that I've done so much on as a reporter—the trafficking, the prostitution, the sex-selective abortions of female fetuses, the rape and all the horrible stuff. This was completely different. This was about love and intimacy and how different societies define it and how they experience it.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned your life as a young single foreign correspondent and the affairs, and that's kind of the movie picture: In between firefights everybody's having great romances and love affairs. How did being a young single woman in that field shape your views on sex and love and relationships?

AMANPOUR: I was free in those years. I was on the road. I didn't have any constraints from family, and I was able to explore my emotional and physical desires. I know it's a cliché: As one male colleague used to say, wheels up, rings off. Now, I wasn't married, so there was no ring to take off, but I met fantastic people who had the same worldview. We were on the front lines together. We believed in the same struggle. We were proud of our work and thought we were doing something that made the world a better place. As I say, you're on the extreme end of human experience in every way, even in your love affairs. It was great. And I'm still friends with a lot of them.

PLAYBOY: You don't have to name names, but any you remember particularly fondly?

AMANPOUR: Very fondly. The person who was my main boyfriend for the longest time. Yeah, very fondly.

PLAYBOY: What did you take away from that relationship?

AMANPOUR: That it wouldn't have lasted because we were both too focused on our careers.

PLAYBOY: In your personal life and now in your reporting on sex and that realm of human experience for your *Sex & Love Around the World* series, what might be informative or useful to, let's say, a typical PLAYBOY reader, who's probably a man? What does he need to know?

AMANPOUR: Okay, that's interesting. I think he needs to know what I discovered reporting the *Sex & Love* series: not only the obvious, consent and all the rest of it, but that a man needs to be sensitive to what makes a woman tick; what it is that satisfies a woman emotionally, physically, sexually. I've noticed from a lot of the interviews I've done around this subject that the couples who feel the most heard are those who talk together the most and express their desires to each other. Communication came across as one of the most significant aspects of what makes relationships successful or not. That's important for men to understand, because I think men traditionally are less communicative. Women have the reputation of always wanting to talk, but we do it because we want to break down barriers—our own barriers, but also the barriers that may be preventing couples from really getting to know each other.

PLAYBOY: Sex can be quite hard to talk about, even in very libertine societies.

AMANPOUR: Yes and no. I was so amazed by how open these girls and women were to me. I mean, when I asked this Afghan woman who was pregnant with her third child—she was probably no more than 20—I said to her, "Are you happy?" and the translator said, "Are you sure you want me to ask her that question?" She said in that society and in that milieu, it can be a subversive question. And that is perhaps one of the most important takeaways from the entire series for me, because it just summed up everything: There are hundreds of millions of women around the world who don't dare imagine they have a right not just to be happy but to ask for happiness and love and care from their partners. That was an eye-opener to me.

PLAYBOY: The series, to me, was quite unexpected. I'm wondering if you learned anything in your reporting that feels resonant to this period in your life—your "sexy 60s."

AMANPOUR: That's a slogan I made up to make myself feel better. But in many ways there's a freedom that comes with a certain age. I'm really lucky. I'm still gainfully employed, doing something incredibly satisfying on a really important network with a really great audience around the world and around the United States. How much luckier can I get? Seriously—it's not a rhetorical question. I've received a lot, and I hope I've given back a lot. I hope it's going to be sexy 60s. There's a lot out there I don't even know about that I want to explore.

And that's what it is: I don't have the answers for the first time. I've just figured it out while you're talking to me. I don't have the answers. I don't know what's out there. And it's a little scary, and it's exciting. I think I'm on my last 30 good years and I want to make them great.

PLAYBOY: What's that going to look like?

AMANPOUR: We'll see.



UŽUPIS UTOPIA

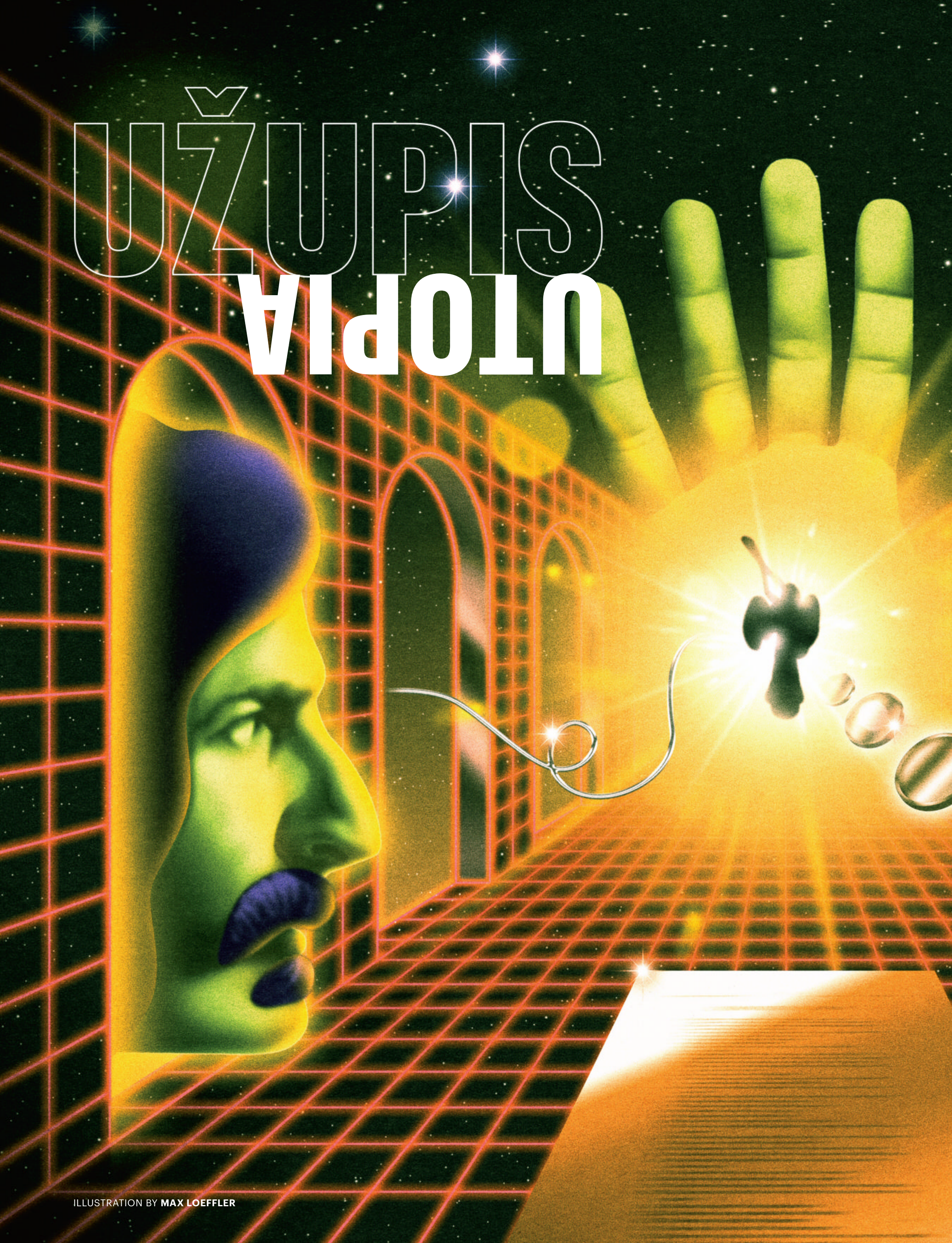
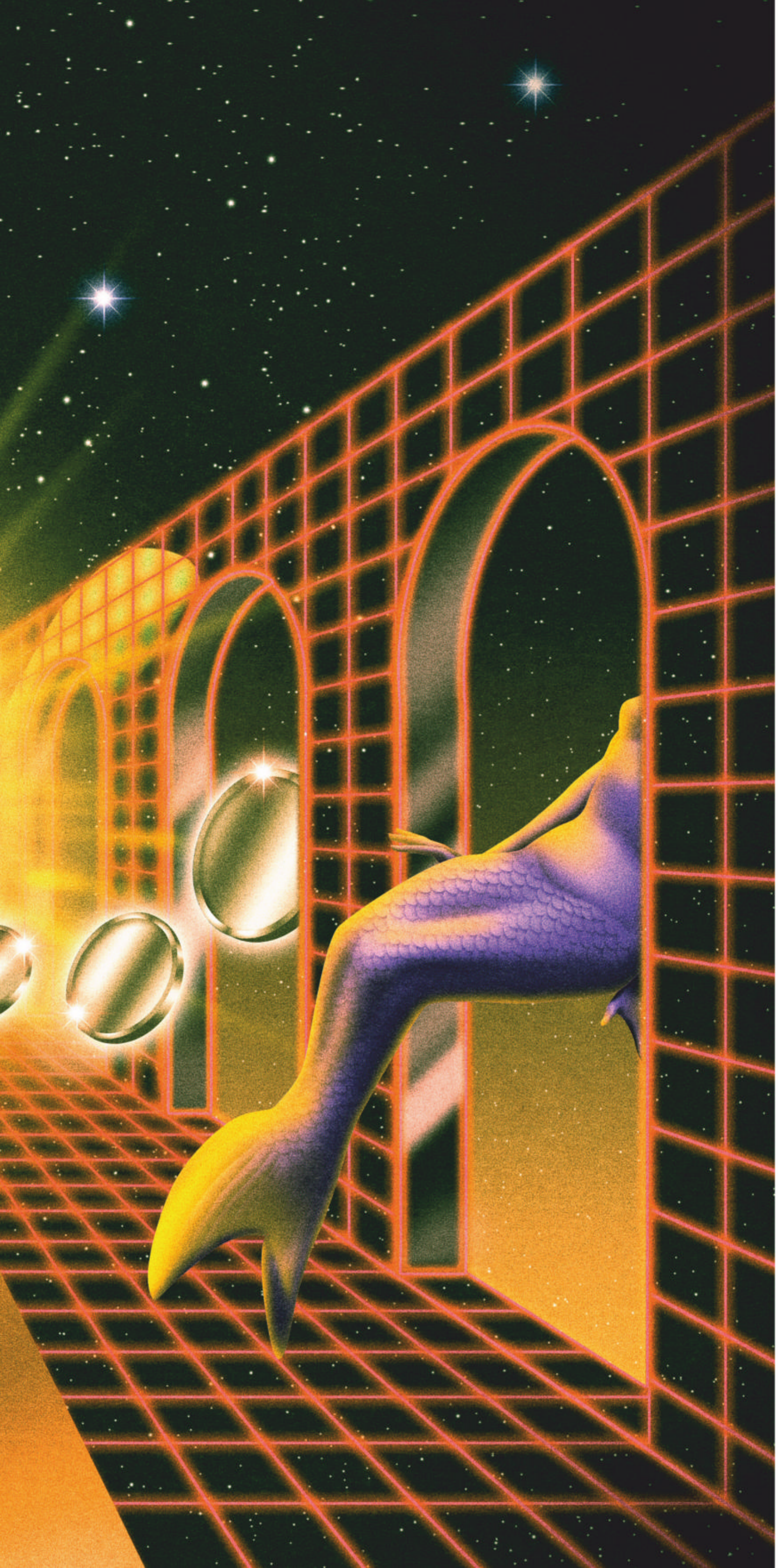


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What's the true story behind a make-believe republic in Eastern Europe that captures the imagination of everyone who visits? Daisy Alioto searches for meaning in a booming micronation

Before traveling to Užupis, a self-declared republic within the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, I read the 2009 novel *The Republic of Užupis,* by Korean author Haïlji. The protagonist, Hal, hopes to return to Užupis to lay to rest his father's ashes. Upon arriving, he encounters confusion about the republic's location, first with customs agents at the airport and then with his taxi driver, who circles Vilnius for more than an hour searching for the neighborhood. This is pure magical realism, but the allegory makes its point: Užupis, a micronation founded in 1998, is elusive to outsiders but meaningful to those who want to believe.

Arriving via Stockholm, I begin my journey differently than Hal. I bypass customs at Vilnius Airport and head straight into a cab. The driver easily pulls up my Užupian Airbnb on GPS. We wind through the narrow turns of Vilnius's Old Town, and Billie Eilish's familiar vocal fry on "Bad Guy" growls from the speakers as we cross the Bridge of Užupis. *Užupis* means "beyond the river," and the republic's parliament is housed in a watering hole that overlooks the moat-like border. In an alcove in the stone embankment sits a bronze mermaid statue that's famous among locals; it was created by Romas Vilčiauskas, an unremarkable sculptor by Google standards. Legend has it that if you look into the mermaid's eyes too long, you'll never leave.

Visiting a new city just as the leaves start to turn is one of travel's many charms. Visiting a micronation on the precipice of autumn belongs in a separate category. Here, the air

> My intention was to pack all the world into one little place."

shivers with the past and a promise for the future of humanity. The Užupian constitution, 41 articles in length, is posted on mirrored plaques for public consumption and is considered required reading for tourists. Rūta Ostrovskaja, the republic's Ambassador in Vigor and Decision Making, calls the document "one of the best human rights declarations in the world." Articles range from "Everyone has the right to love" to "Everyone has the right to cry." Some border on the absurd. ("A cat is not obliged to love its owner but must help in time of nee[d].") Notably, in December 2018, the version of the constitution at the Embassy of the Republic of Užupis to Munich—the document has been translated into dozens of languages—became the first ever to recognize artificial intelligence: "Any artificial intelligence has the right to believe in a good will of humanity." (Said embassy consists of a small collective of artists and techies based in the Bavarian capital.) According to Ostrovskaja, the constitution wasn't written to be zany. It was written in the interest of survival.

Užupis was founded on April Fools' Day 1998 and has since captured the attention of artists, poets and the technologically forward alike. It raises questions about the dwindling possibilities for borderless states in a post-digital world and the potential for creative autonomy and self-governance amid rampant globalism. Comprising 148 acres and cordoned off from the rest of the capital by the Vilnia River, it has roughly 7,000 inhabitants. MicroFreedom, a website that indexes the world's micronations, ranks Užupis as "distinguished" for its longevity and success. It has been likened to Christiania, Copenhagen's hippie commune, minus the open-air cannabis market. Munich's ambassador to Užupis, Max Haarich, has even suggested that it's the most stable republic in Europe. Yet the ephemeral nature of a micronation invites projection and change: Depending on whom you ask, Užupis is either a revolutionary political project or a fairy tale; it's a figment of the Baltic imagination or another rapidly gentrifying former Bohemia. In truth, Užupis is all these things.

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The Office of the Geographer and Global Issues, a division of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research within the U.S. State Department, owns a collection of letters that have been referred to internally as the Ephemeral States file. The collection paints the micronation movement as a study in contrasts. One letter is from Leicester Hemingway, brother of Ernest, and comes with an endorsement from an employee of the Inspector General's Office that reads, in part, "She knows Mr. Hemingway quite well and says he is not a kook and that he is quite serious about this cause." The endorsement pertains to Hemingway's 1973 request that the United States recognize an artificially created island near the Bahamas. The request was denied. Another letter, from an indigenous leader, sought permission to establish the Maori Kingdom of Tetiti Islands in the South Pacific. Nothing came of it.

Most of the file's contents are comical and a testament to the male desire to conquer even a thimble's worth of territory. But some letters, such as the one from the Maori Kingdom, are harder to dismiss. In a region littered with colonial holdovers, who's to say who owns what?

The internet has no doubt accelerated interest in micronations. It has also divorced the movement from physical territories, though the existence of areas such as Užupis, which the Dalai Lama visited in June 2001, continues to lend credence to land projects. Travis McHenry, who manages MicroFreedom, tells me that the late-1990s rise of GeoCities, which stored user-created web pages, was instrumental in bringing awareness to individual micronations and the movement as a whole. In 2001, he used GeoCities to build a web presence for his own micronation, Westarctica, which corresponds to 620,000 square miles of unclaimed territory in Antarctica. McHenry, who was in the Navy at the time, staked his claim online for fun. He says the project backfired when two men from the Pentagon came to interrogate him and threatened to revoke his security clearance. Tensions were high in 2001, so McHenry recused himself from his "throne" until his military service ended. He has since transitioned Westarctica into an environmental nonprofit that advocates for the preservation of the region.

The Seasteading Institute, founded by libertarians in 2008, sits on a similar axis of good intentions and make-believe. Its mission is to build autonomous floating cities to counter global ills such as rising sea levels, overpopulation and poor governance, but tax evasion would no doubt be a primary draw for the wealthy wishing to establish residence on a seafaring city. The institute's ambassador program represents 29 countries and 24 U.S. states, as well as Washington, D.C. Venture capitalist Peter Thiel has already invested in the project.

Elsewhere are subreddits, Facebook groups and at least one Discord chat devoted to the micronation movement and populated by younger generations. Of the increasing interest among young people in establishing their own sovereignty, McHenry points out that it solves two perennial gripes of adolescence: a "lack of control and having no friends." It's also a creative exercise, offering opportunities to design currency, flags and stamps. Some of these useless stamps, termed Cinderellas, become collectors' items, according to MicroFreedom founder Steven Scharff. "Not because of the fantasy element," he says. "The running joke is that the issuing party is gone at midnight."

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On my first night in Užupis, I manage to avert my eyes from the mermaid and instead focus on the Bridge of Užupis as I wait in parliament for the foreign minister, Tomas Čepaitis. I watch a man wade into the river to fasten a wooden swing to the wrought iron railing, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Known as Destiny's Swing, the attraction is a permanent fixture; the laborer is replacing its broken predecessor. Above the

swing are doily-like dream catchers made by local grandmothers. "They're going to dissolve in the winter, like our memories of our women," Ostrovskaja later tells me.

Čepaitis and Romas Lileikis, Užupis's president, founded the republic and wrote its constitution in an attempt to reshape the area's history. Before World War II, Užupis was a Jewish neighborhood, but about 95 percent of Lithuania's Jewish population was killed in the Holocaust. The emptied area deteriorated and criminals terrorized anyone unfortunate enough to walk the neighborhood after sunset. The area's main thoroughfare soon earned the nickname "the Street of Death."

Čepaitis was familiar with the works of midcentury Polish writer and futurist Stanisław Lem, who predicted such technologies as virtual reality and search engines. Now that those innovations are no longer science fiction, Čepaitis is less interested in them. Amid the technological developments of the past two decades, Čepaitis tells me, "the soul remained the same—or became more savage." He adds, "You cannot live in a fairy tale all the time; you cannot live in reality all the time. My intention was to pack all the world into one little place."

Declaring independence has been a test, in some form, of Lithuania's post-Soviet government. Would the area tolerate a new doctrine? The material conditions of Užupis have certainly improved since 1998—almost too much. For more than two decades the area has prospered under the utopian constitution. In 2004, geographers Harald Standl and Dovilė Krupickaitė published a study of gentrification in Vilnius with a special focus on Užupis. They found that between 1998 and 2003, real estate prices in the area rose by more than 70 percent. They also found that 65 percent of the heads of "new households" in Užupis had a university degree, versus 12 percent of "old households."

Užupis is now one of the most expensive places to live in Vilnius. Electric scooters zip by a sculpture of an angel in the republic's central square. Herr Katt, a hip barbershop, and Kitsch, a gallery-café, cater to a new generation. Kitsch accepts Bitcoin. It also serves an Užburger on a blue bun in homage to the republic's flag, which features a hand encircled in blue. Čepaitis tells me these changes are not unwelcome as long as the atmosphere is preserved, but he also claims that historic wooden buildings have conveniently gone up in flames to make way for development. In this way, Užupis is no different from every gentrifying community in the 21st century.

In 2013, Gleb Divov, a Moscow native, was planning a move to Barcelona. He was set to open a company there and had even learned Spanish. On a whim, he booked a three-day trip to Vilnius and ventured into Užupis on the last. "When I walked across the bridge, it just clicked: Okay, I'm home," he says. Divov subsequently moved to the area, where he founded a start-up, Musical Blockchain, that aims to bring residents together with compositions created by artificial intelligence.

Divov is a synesthete: He can hear a melody just by looking at an object. His AI composer uses more than 40 data points—from color to shape to environmental conditions—along with a coded knowledge of music to turn areas of Vilnius into a symphony. "We define musical composition as a chain of linked blocks," he explains. Now Užupis's Minister of Sound, Events and Technologies, Divov dreams of implementing this tool as a means of canceling out noise pollution and drawing attention and new visitors to underdeveloped parts of the city.

The city wasn't always tourist-friendly, according to William Adan Pahl, a Detroit native who has lived in Lithuania since the year of Užupis's founding. But Užupis, by welcoming newcomers with open arms, benefited from a wave of tourism that flooded Eastern Europe following the Pan-European expansion of Ryanair airlines and Lithuania's new popularity as a destination for bachelor parties. ("The cities of Eastern Europe may come to curse the day they ever got that Ryanair route," reported *The Independent* in 2016. "Yes, invading hordes of drunken Brits is good for the local economy, but at what greater cost?")

"It was like something was coming from off in the distance and we were going to be ready for that change when it came," Pahl says. He stops short of calling the government a drinking club and considers the constitution a symbol rather than a living political document. "From my point of view, we're celebrating the instrument of the constitution. It's the focus of a celebration. It's not a tool. It reflects the spirit of the place," Pahl says.

Haarich, the Munich ambassador, wants to use Užupis as a model for bringing together techie and art communities. He worked in artificial intelligence at a start-up center partnered with BMW, among other companies, that has plans to expand into one of Munich's artist communities. "Artists can make technology more ethical just by bringing it closer to society and making it more accessible," he says. "There's this big threat of gentrification—but there's this big chance to create something very innovative that I want to connect to Užupis because it has 22 years of experience with gentrification."

Haarich is part of a Facebook group dedicated to micronations. It's filled with people hoping to found their own Užupis. Few of these communities will survive—but if they do, technology will likely play a role. McHenry says, "They really are an inspiration to every other micronation out there and to common people who have no idea what a micronation is."

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As if to underscore the fascination with Užupis's origins, a Korean production company is filming a re-creation of the annual April 1 celebration of independence during my visit. On that date every year, tourists can get their passports stamped on the bridge, and government ministers are paid for their service in rare Užupian currency. At this mock celebration, a band plays "When the Saints Go Marching In" as actors on stilts walk alongside cars flying the republic's flag. I approach two locals cast as extras who, like me, are watching the action.

"I've never seen a Lithuanian dressed like this," says a girl costumed in Victorian fashion. Her companion is wearing a parrot suit.

"Is the parrot customary?" I ask.

"No." We both laugh.

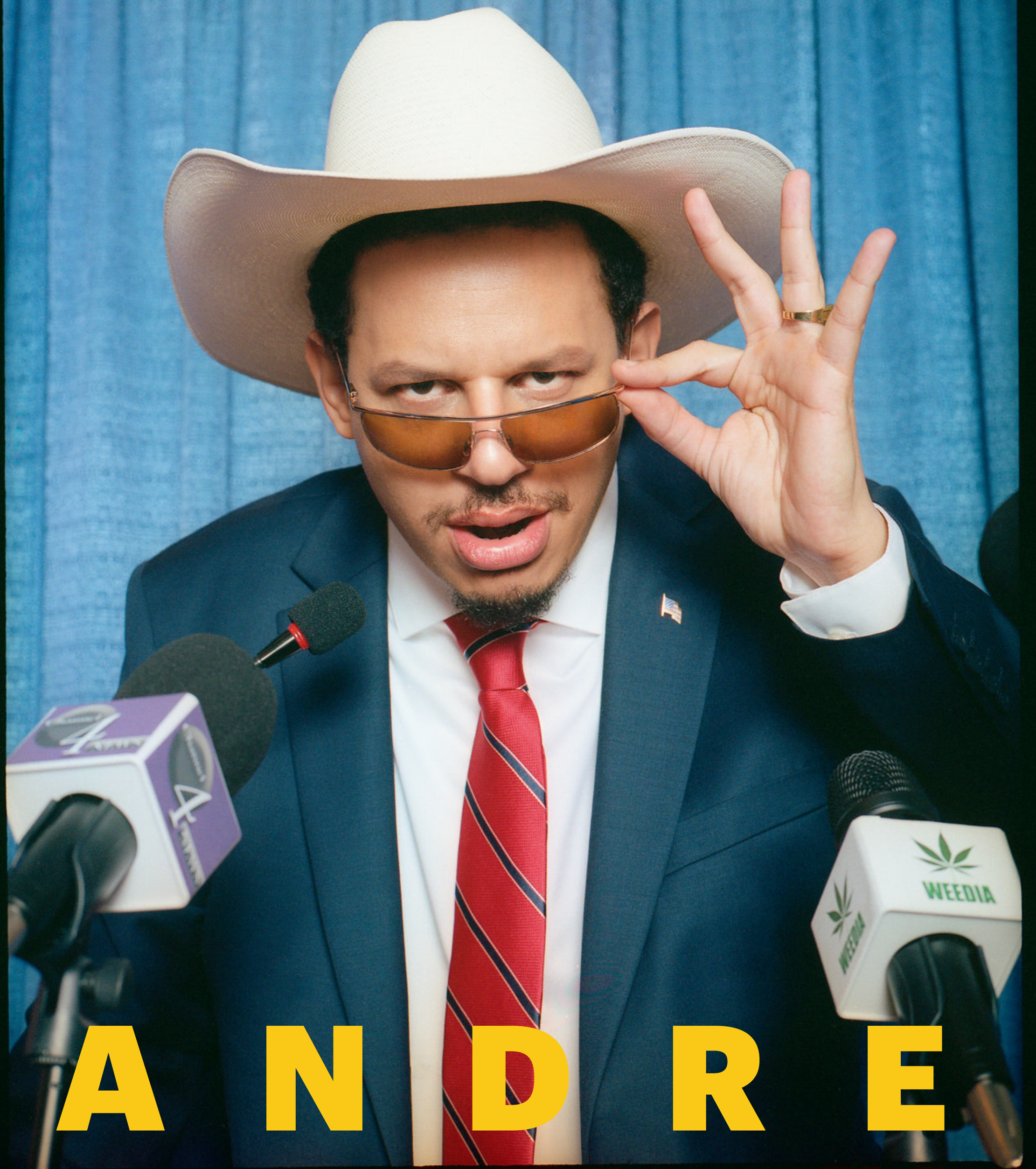
On my last day I revisit the constitution plaques and wait for other tourists to leave before setting my palm on the Open Hand of Užupis, which is mounted nearby. Tourists lay their hands on this symbol for good luck. It shares its design with the official flag: a hand with a hole through the middle. Some sources cite it as a symbol of refusing bribes, but Ostrovskaja tells me it means "easy come, easy go"—as in, one can't hold on to material things. I touch it and feel an invisible country slip through my fingers.

In his book *Invisible Cities,* the Italian journalist and author Italo Calvino writes, "The catalogue of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins." Before I leave, Čepaitis gives me a book of poetry by a Finnish ambassador. When I open it back home in New York City, a stamp falls out. Its provenance: the Federal Republic of Lostisland.

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E R I C



A N D R E

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FOR PRESIDENT

Introducing the Cool Party: No Policies, Just Attitude

It's about attitude, and it's about time. Eric Andre, host of Adult Swim's *The Eric Andre Show* and star of the prank-based feature film *Bad Trip,* is running for president and, like most of his fellow candidates, investing all his energy in the construction of an attention-grabbing persona. Unlike his rivals—with the exception of our actual president—the Florida-born hopeful is building his image on a platform of blatant falsehoods, below-the-belt insults and dereliction of duty. We caught up with Andre at a salon, where a manicurist buffed fake tanner off his fingernails, and adjourned to his favorite Korean barbecue restaurant. There, he ate eel and pressed the flesh (and discussed his plan to celebrate a "crystal-meth Christmas") with a few starry-eyed constituents. He also gave us a glimpse into the Cool Party campaign, Russian pee-pee tape and all.—*James Rickman*

PLAYBOY: Between Trump and Tom Steyer, we have two billionaires in the running. How's your war chest?
ANDRE: I'm a thousandaire. I've made over $3,000 in my life. I dare you to find the person who's more qualified than me. I'm making over 250 bucks a *week*.
PLAYBOY: Any campaign-trail highlights so far?
ANDRE: None. I'm avoiding my constituents as much as possible. I've been spending all my time at Jimmy Buffett concerts and drinking Shamrockin' Sangria at Bennigan's.
PLAYBOY: What's the change you want to see in the world?
ANDRE: I don't want to see anything. I'm going to close my eyes and let my constituents do whatever. I want to golf and sleep under my desk as much as possible. I have absolutely

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MILLICENT HAILES**





no policies. And that's my promise to the American people: I'm just about attitude and swagger.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about attitude. How do you define it?

ANDRE: Well, *Webster's* dictionary defines attitude as telling people your opponent sucks his own dick at night. I couldn't believe Webster. I was like, "Webster, you old fool! You *on* one!"

PLAYBOY: You've actually mentioned on the trail that your opponent "sucks his own dick at night." Do you think that's an appropriate thing for a candidate to say, and were you speaking metaphorically?

ANDRE: I think it's more appropriate now than ever. I was speaking metaphorically *and* literally. Furthermore, I don't know who my opponent is.

PLAYBOY: Who are you considering for your running mate?

ANDRE: Uh, Jussie Smollett, Lil' Bow Wow, John Hinckley Jr. and Papa John.

PLAYBOY: And who's going to be in your Cabinet?

ANDRE: I'm gonna pull up to a McDonald's at three in the morning in an abandoned school bus and just put a bunch of ding-dongs onto the fuckin' bus and give them total autonomy.

PLAYBOY: You reported from the Republican and the Democratic conventions in 2016——

ANDRE: That's how I got the politics bug.

PLAYBOY: Did those experiences inform your decision to run for president?

ANDRE: Yeah. I was like, Politics is easier than comedy. It's like comedy, but you don't have the pressure of telling jokes; you just get up there and complain about shit and dupe people into thinking you're going to do something while a few oligarchs control everything.

PLAYBOY: Where do you stand on legalization?

ANDRE: Legalization? Of everything? I'm all for it. I mean, doesn't matter to me. Whoever gives me the most money to get into office, I'll do whatever they want. I'm going to be pretty drunk on power. And schnapps.

PLAYBOY: What would you legalize first?

ANDRE: OxyContin. [*burps*] Excuse me. That's on the record, by the way. That's going in the anals [sic] of history.

PLAYBOY: What about climate change? [*Andre bursts into laughter*] Is it real, and if so what do you plan to do about it?

ANDRE: Wait till those polar ice caps melt, then surf the gnarliest fuckin' tsunami, dude! Right into the Surf Olympics.

PLAYBOY: What's your relationship with the mainstream media?

ANDRE: I don't own a TV and I can't read. I have no relationship with it.

PLAYBOY: We've seen the rise of social media as a political tool. Do you plan on running your own accounts?

ANDRE: I will at first, but I plan on getting hacked so that when I go on a bigoted diatribe and accidentally retweet my porn searches, I'll have an excuse to fall back on and an intern to scapegoat, Ted Cruz–style. He was favoriting porn Twitter accounts, and then he was like [*grunts*], "Uh, my intern did that!" And he still beat the guy from the Mars Volta.

PLAYBOY: Of course, Senator Cruz isn't the only politician who's had to deal with embarrassing leaked documents. Do you anticipate any problems there?

ANDRE: The only problem is figuring out when to release my sex tape, my Russian hooker pee-pee tape, my masturbation tape and my taking-a-dump-on-my-desk tape. [*A constituent at a nearby table offers Andre a glass of beer*] Oh, no thank you. I'm detoxing. I'm going straightedge for two months. And then it's crystal meth come Christmastime. It'll be a crystal-meth Christmas!

PLAYBOY: Presidents Trump, Clinton and Kennedy, to name a few, have gotten into trouble for alleged affairs. Do you anticipate past infidelities being a problem for you?

ANDRE: I anticipate them being a *solution*. Tax dollars will be spent on my personal sexual needs—with transients, drifters and freight-train-ridin' hobos with their lunch on a bandanna hanging off the end of a stick.

PLAYBOY: What do you hope to accomplish in your first 100 days as president?



ANDRE: Oh, getting out of work as much as possible. I won't even move to Washington, D.C. I'll just do a Ferris Bueller: buy a mannequin and a cantaloupe, paint my face on it and put it on marionette ropes in the Oval Office. I'll have a recording of Ronald Reagan snoring so people think I'm at my desk.

PLAYBOY: What are your thoughts on God?

ANDRE: Not a damn thing. I worship Satan, I practice the dark arts, and I own a Ouija board.

PLAYBOY: Is the Ouija board going to factor into your decision-making as president?

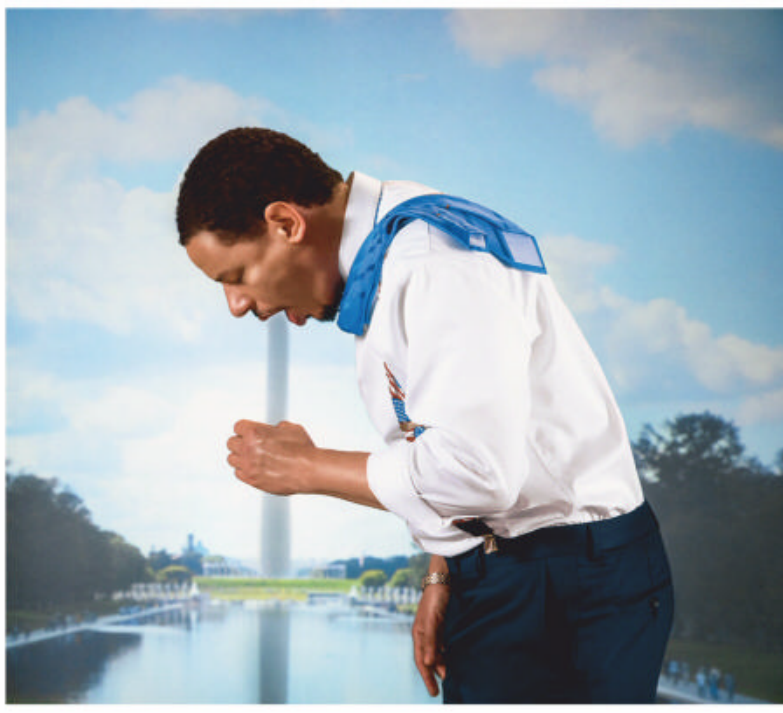
ANDRE: Yeah. If I'm president, I'm going to throw pagan menstrual blood at Stonehenge. That's how I'll pick my winning lottery numbers.

PLAYBOY: What's your message to the children of America?

ANDRE: Don't listen to your parents. They're fuckin' out to get you, man. They're out to kill your buzz, bro.

PLAYBOY: And finally, are you concerned that the demands and exposure that come with the job will affect your family?

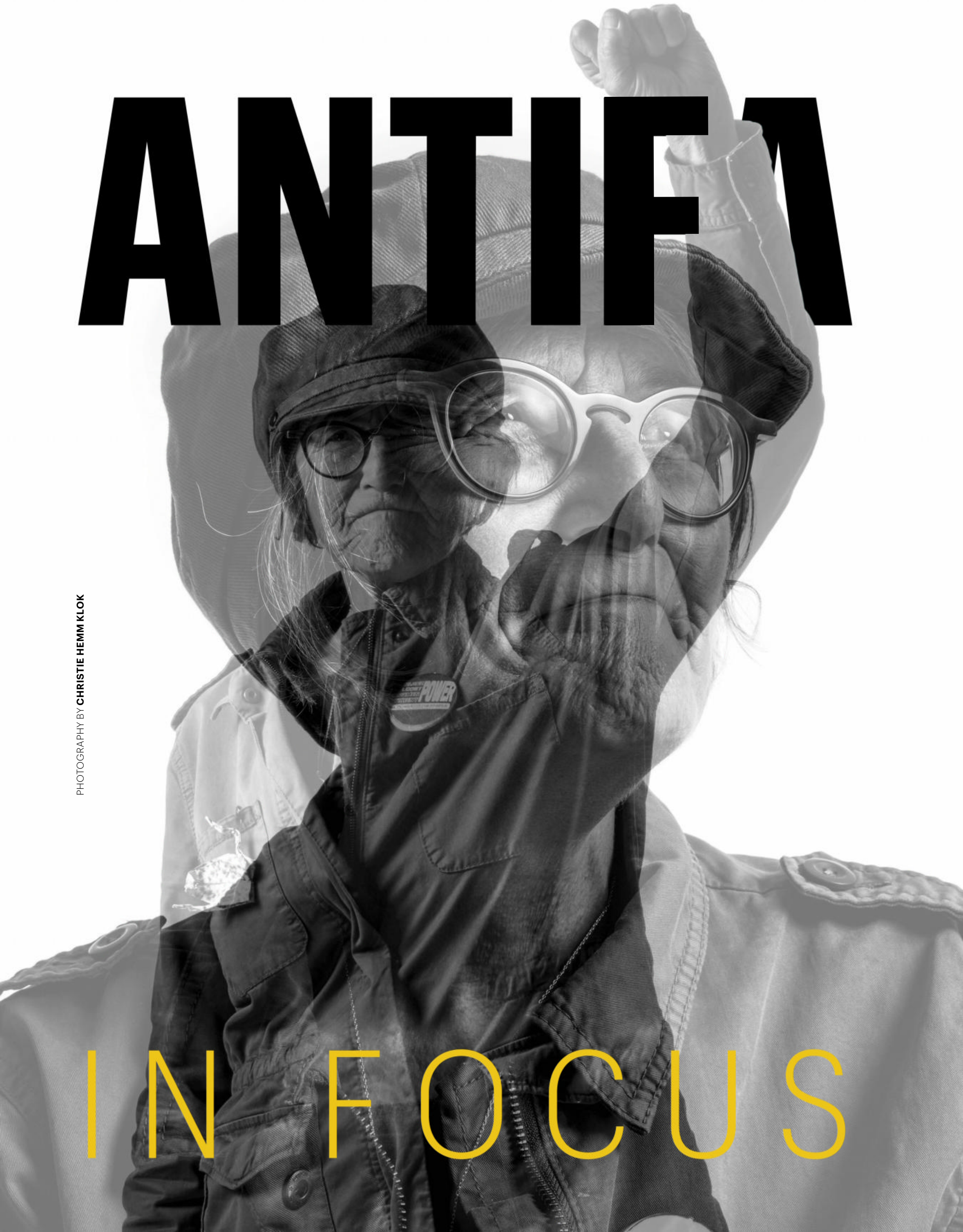
ANDRE: I don't know. [*pauses*] Leave me alone! That'd be great if someone was on the campaign trail and just kept saying, "*Leave me alone!*"



I'M GOING TO BE PRETTY **DRUNK ON POWER.** AND **SCHNAPPS.**



ANTIFA



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRISTIE HEMM KLOK**

IN FOCUS

A rare look inside America's antifascist movement—the people, the methods and the struggle to find a clear voice in a deafening world

BY **DONOVAN FARLEY**

When I call Gregory McKelvey and Kathryn Stevens, they're in the midst of an alternately quiet and cacophonous Saturday afternoon typical to young parents. The Portland, Oregon–based pair, interracial and in their late 20s, plan to be married next year. Thankful one of their two babies is asleep, Stevens breast-feeds the other during our interview. Neither parent comes across as a domestic terrorist.

But McKelvey and Stevens are involved with antifa—a decentralized network of leftists representing various belief systems and tactics, united only in their opposition to nationalists and white supremacists—and as such they inhabit the same category as the Unabomber and Timothy McVeigh. Or they would, if senators Ted Cruz and Bill Cassidy had succeeded last summer in designating the movement a domestic terrorist group. (Regarding the senators' efforts, President Trump tweeted, "Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an 'ORGANIZATION OF TERROR.' ")

McKelvey tells me that despite frequent threats to his family, showing up for antifa actions is something he and Stevens feel they must do. "I think it helps people to see a successful family defending antifascists, because those people often can't defend themselves."

Stevens adds, "When it was just Greg and me, it was easier to say, 'Threaten us all you want. I'm not scared of you.' But now, with two babies, it's not okay at all. I haven't hurt anybody, and I have no intention of hurting anyone, so why would you threaten my family? It's solely because of our political beliefs."

Perhaps the problem lies in pinpointing what those beliefs are, how the movement acts on them and whom the movement consists of in the first place.

That confusion has often led to fear and anger, exacerbated by antifascists' use of anonymity as a defense against arrest and doxxing—though doxxing is also one of antifa's tactics. Notwithstanding recent efforts to raise this shroud of secrecy, including non-anonymous interviews with outlets such as *Rolling Stone* (and this one), anonymity has allowed a group of loosely connected activists to be demonized by members of the far right and, increasingly, centrists and moderate Democrats. As we stagger toward the 2020 election, antifa finds itself at a crossroads: Can it succeed, or even survive, without taking up the very tools its opponents have wielded to such ruthless effect?

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I've studied Portland's antifa community since it came to prominence in the wake of the 2016 election, and I've reported on several protests and actions in that time. I can't claim total impartiality, in large part because many of my friends and neighbors are involved in the movement, but I can say I've observed antifa's victories and dysfunctions at close range. It's the movement's unique position in American culture—how it works, how it's perceived and the gaping blind spot between the two—that I've set out to explore.

For this story I interviewed a dozen or so antifa activists, who gave me new insights into the range of their methods, from electoral campaigns to, yes,



street confrontations. Although monitoring far-right groups online is a crucial part of the movement's work, I'm more interested in its public-facing efforts—the attempts to puncture the antifa stereotype, reveal the sprawling community beneath and loudly voice the message uniting them all: Hate requires active and direct confrontation.

But learning more about antifa requires a treacherous journey through its internal and external challenges. And you can't get a more potent demonstration of those challenges than a string of events, briefly violent and wholly absurd, that unfolded last summer.

On May 1, 2019, writer, Twitter personality and occasional Fox News commentator Andy Ngo was videotaped by an undercover antifascist who had embedded with the far-right organization Patriot Prayer. (A Portland grand jury later used the video to indict several Patriot Prayer members.) In it, Ngo appears to smile while others make plans to attack a Portland cidery known to be an antifa hangout. According to reports, the ensuing incident left a woman with a broken vertebra after a man hit her with a baton. Ngo would then dox the injured woman as she lay in the hospital; she reportedly awoke to a cavalcade of death threats.

For this, plus previous instances of what some consider Islamophobia and misinformation on his social accounts, Ngo became fair game in the minds of some antifascists. (In an op-ed, he pushed back against the allegations of Islamophobia.) On June 29, at a Portland rally organized by Patriot Prayer, he was punched and kicked by antifascists in black clothes and masks, who then stole the stunned writer's GoPro. Overnight, Ngo morphed from a fringe figure to a national sympathy case who received nearly $195,000 from a GoFundMe organized by conservative commentator Michelle Malkin.

If only that were the end of the story.

The rally landed at the end of Pride Month, and the antifa group PopMob (short for Popular Mobilization) had organized a massive dance party for queer people and their allies to oppose the Proud Boys and other organizations that had joined in with Patriot Prayer. In a move reminiscent of recent antifascist actions in the U.K., PopMob decided to bring vegan coconut milkshakes. Antifa activists hit Ngo with multiple shakes, and Portland police, acting on a tip, tweeted, "Police have received information that some of the milkshakes thrown today during the demonstration contained quick-drying cement." This tweet, which at press time is still on the department's official Twitter page and has more than 13,000 retweets and 25,000 likes, has yet to be substantiated by a single piece of evidence.

"We definitely weren't advocating throwing them at people," says Effie Baum, a fourth-year graduate student and member of PopMob, "but we weren't naive enough to think it might not happen." Baum, who uses they/them pronouns, laughs tiredly at the suggestion that the shakes contained any sort of hardening agent. They point out, as many have, that PopMob would have been risking the murder of hundreds of people had they laced the drinks. This did not stop Fox News from reporting that "the so-called 'milkshakes' reportedly contained quick-drying cement, pepper spray and raw eggs." The attention resulted in Baum receiving hundreds of violent threats from around the country.

It's no surprise that the Ngo incident played well with the Fox audience, but CNN's Jake Tapper took it upon himself to retweet a video of Ngo post-punch with the caption "Antifa regularly attacks journalists; it's reprehensible." (The "attacks" he posted included an egg being tossed, a camera cord being cut and University of Virginia students yelling at a journalist.) Tapper's colleague John Berman invited Ngo on his show. Neither anchor brought up Ngo's history of posting false or misleading statements on his Twitter account.

So—an attempt at peaceful protest was compromised by a moment of violence at

the hands of ostensible allies; that violence was pounced on by the opposition and swiftly turned into a narrative that was amplified by law enforcement and major media outlets.

The antifascists involved didn't have the media apparatus in place to combat the disinformation (though Baum tried), and a major opportunity to correct the record—to proclaim that antifa is not a pack of extremist hooligans—was lost in a fog of tweets and sound bites.

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The antifascist activists I interviewed for this piece are eager to change the perception of the movement and spoke with me knowing they would receive torrents of threats for doing so. The vast majority of antifascist work consists, they tell me, not of black masks, street clashes and weaponized milkshakes but of behind-the-scenes organizing and countless hours spent observing far-right communication channels.

People who do antifascist work are not, by and large, participants in the so-called black bloc, whose masks and sometimes aggressive presence at rallies are a magnet for media attention. Antifascists are doctors, parents and baristas. They're your neighbors. There are so many grandmothers involved in antifascist actions in Portland alone that they have their own organization, complete with monthly meetings and a Facebook page. At the Occupy ICE PDX protests last June, directly in front of federal agents dressed in riot gear and holding rifles sat a row of grannies. One of them was knitting.

So why has antifascism become demonized by the right and shunned by the left? Much of the answer lies in the movement's anonymity and disdain for figureheads. Groups like Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys, along with their admirers in the media and Washington, D.C., have cultivated a stable of big personalities and a knack for messaging that has served them well under President Trump, allowing them to shape their own narrative and that of antifascism. In the social-media age, when information (and misinformation) travels the world in the blink of an eye, the messaging effort is often as important as the message itself. It's not enough to be on the right side of history; you have to be on the right side of those reading and writing that history. While the far right has flourished, antifascists have painted themselves into a lonely corner by shunning the press and the centrist public.

“Going out in the streets is only about 10 percent of what we do.”

Lucky for them, the press isn't the only tool at their disposal.

“I feel a responsibility to change the public discourse around antifascism, absolutely,” says Sarah Iannarone, a 2020 candidate for mayor of Portland. (Her campaign is helmed by McKelvey.) Iannarone is a mother who has spent her professional life trying to make urban spaces greener and more livable, often traveling the world to discuss policy. She's aware that her open support of antifascism will mark her for threats and violence—and possibly cost her political capital—but she feels duty-bound to the cause.

“Our society's lack of awareness and understanding of the issue is extremely disappointing to me,” she says. “Because this problem exists within the system, it's important we use radical tactics—though I definitely think electoral politics matter, and that's why I'm running.”

Iannarone's belief that antifascism should engage with mainstream politics is shared by many of the activists I interviewed; it's one of the reasons they spoke openly with me. These attitudes represent a shift in tactics within a movement that has traditionally been suspicious of the electoral process. Along with a nascent openness to the press, this approach could go a long way toward correcting the rampant misinformation against them.

PopMob's Baum represents a more counterintuitive strain of the “radical tactics” Iannarone mentioned. Over the past year, PopMob and its allies have sought to combat both the far right's endeavors and antifa's messaging problems through resistance theatrics, using marching bands to drown out loudspeakers and recently launching the “Banana Bloc,” wherein roughly 40 activists dressed in banana suits and armed with brass instruments led a parade of about 100 people to protest a Proud Boys rally.

Baum points to community building and organizing as PopMob's central aim. In March 2019, after a series of attacks befell Portland's LGBTQ community, PopMob rapidly put together an event attended by about 600 people, featuring self-defense and community-awareness lessons. The organizers handed out more than 1,000 whistles, flashlights and self-defense key chains.

“I volunteered because I wanted to change attitudes,” Baum says. “Going out in the streets is only about 10 percent of what we do.”

“The people who are open about their involvement need to **change their rhetoric,** because right now we’re bringing a **knife to a gunfight.**”

Opening page: Margaret "Peggy" Zebroski. **Previous spread:** Gregory McKelvey and Kathryn Stevens. **This page, clockwise from left:** Jacob Bureros, Effie Baum and Olivia Katbi Smith.









This page: An activist using black-bloc tactics charges through a 2019 May Day rally in Paris. **Opposite page:** The Banana Bloc, shown here at a Portland rally in August 2019, demonstrates its take on antifascist activism.

Jacob Bureros, an activist whose participation in rallies and press ops subjects him to constant death threats, points to rarely covered community-minded work—such as the aid provided to Portland's most vulnerable residents during a brutal ice storm in January 2017. Activists delivered blankets and hot meals to the city's homeless and offered transportation to shelters. After a rash of violent attacks against the homeless in 2018, antifascists set up patrols of the various homeless camps around town.

And then there's Margaret "Peggy" Zebroski, a 69-year-old retired physician's assistant and grandmother. In February 2017, Zebroski participated in a protest against the killing of Quanice Hayes, a 17-year-old African American who was fatally shot by a white Portland cop with an AR-15 after Hayes had allegedly used a toy airsoft gun in a robbery. At the protest, a Portland police officer—in full riot gear, despite there being only about 50 protesters—pinned Zebroski's head to the pavement with his knee, breaking her nose.

"Well, I have to tell you that for me, in the context of things, this was a pretty trivial event," Zebroski tells me. "I've been doing demonstrations since I was a teenager. I've been clubbed in the head in San Francisco during Vietnam protests. It's the police harming the elderly, and that's upsetting—I get that. But we were protesting Quanice Hayes being killed. He died; I only had my nose broken."

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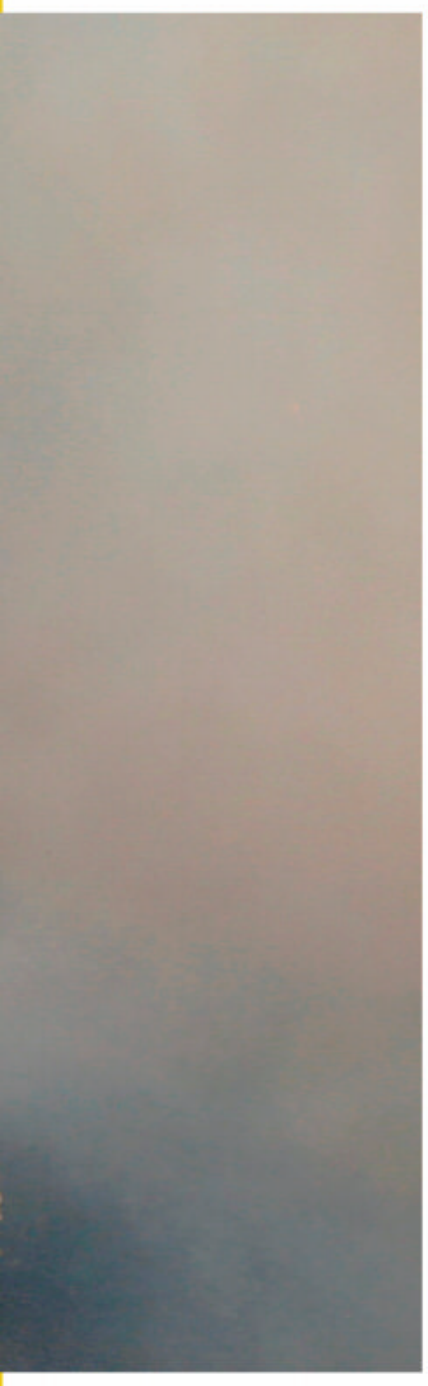
Even in the face of such ardent civil disobedience, the question of physical confrontation remains. If antifascism really favors vigilance and community building over fists, why do some of its adherents give the far right what it wants by meeting its violence with more violence? Because for better or worse, sometimes it works out in the left's favor.

David (not his real name) is a family man in his mid-30s and a member of Rose City Antifa, one of America's oldest antifascist groups. He cites Richard Spencer, the white nationalist whose fame peaked after he was punched in the face with cameras running. Spencer's assertion that the black bloc has made his allies afraid to show up to events suggests that violently confronting the far right can be an effective tactic. "If they can't find a protester in black bloc to fight," David explains, "they're going to go beat up an African American teen at a mall who is not involved in a protest whatsoever. They're going to attack somebody just walking down the street."

But the threat of violence goes beyond civilians on the far edges of the political spectrum. And for Bureros, a man of Filipino descent and a young father of two, the real danger doesn't come from the bigots in the streets.

"For all the threats I get, I'm still more afraid of the police state and what it can do," he says. "When you have police who can do whatever they want to you with impunity, that's a lot scarier."

An editorial in a 2017 issue of *Pax Centurion,* the official publication of the



Boston Police Patrolmen's Association, informed readers that, when dealing with antifascists, "the only way to defeat these savages is to fight fire with fire." The piece went on to equate antifascism with Nazism.

"The problem, of course, is with that blanket statement," says Norm Stamper, Seattle's police chief during the 1999 World Trade Organization protests, which helped give rise to Occupy Wall Street and much of the modern protest movement. (Stamper has repeatedly voiced his regrets at the heavy-handedness with which his department responded to the massive protest.) "It's just plain wrong, and it's dangerous and ridiculous to think that way.

"Law enforcement has a responsibility to protect everyone at a protest—or a counterprotest—no matter what they're saying or what they believe," he adds. "It's extremely difficult at times, but that's the job we signed up for."

Of the domestic-terrorist designation and its ties to policing, he says, "There is a fascist thread working its way through the body politic, and its head cheerleader is Donald Trump. His diehard followers would absolutely use such a designation to force law enforcement to help further their political cause, which is antithetical to what law enforcement is ostensibly all about."

Of course, quasi-fascism and *Pax Centurion* don't begin to speak for all law enforcement, and the rare instances of antifa affiliates hurling various projectiles their way are further steps away from antifa's core message. (The antifa slogan "All cops are bastards"—or ACAB—while not equivalent to *Pax Centurion*'s claims, isn't helping either.) Activists say their anger arises with good reason and that they're often left to fend for themselves when attacked. In Portland, instances of overzealous policing include shooting nonlethal rounds into crowds of peaceful protesters, resulting in devastating head injuries; charging groups of black bloc antifascists, regular citizens and journalists alike (myself included); striking civilians with batons while driving them toward downtown traffic; and disproportionately arresting leftist protesters.

Which brings us back to black bloc—a small and often messy faction but an integral one. In January 2019, Patriot Prayer attempted to storm a Democratic Socialists of America meeting at Portland's Industrial Workers of the World union office. Portland DSA co-chair Olivia Katbi Smith wasn't there that night, but she's been present for many similar Patriot Prayer–led incursions.

"It's incredibly frustrating when they do things like try to invade our meetings," Katbi Smith says. Reflecting on black bloc's greater significance, she adds, "People still wonder why we need the black bloc out there. *That's* exactly why. They put their bodies on the line for us."

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When I ask McKelvey about the future of the movement, he replies without hesitation.

"Antifascism sure as hell has a PR problem," he says.

He goes on, and his words suggest an outline of how the movement might finally find a voice to meet that of the roaring far right: "These elements that Trump has inspired to come out of the woodwork aren't going anywhere regardless of what happens next year, so antifascists aren't either. We need to make it okay for people to say they support antifascism, including people in all levels of government. We're going to need people in the streets forever, but the people who are open about their involvement need to change their rhetoric, because right now we're bringing a knife to a gunfight."

Even if antifa coheres into a force strong enough to shift American culture away from the fears and hatred that continue to work their way into the mainstream, I can't help but think about the effect all that visibility could have on McKelvey and Stevens's family.

"Even with the kids?" I ask.

"Our kids," says Stevens, "are one of the reasons we're out there."



Diane Guerrero

20Q

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KELIA ANNE**

What makes a superhero? A voice, a cause and a will to change the world. The actress-activist, who headlines the HBO Max premiere of DC's *Doom Patrol*, has all three and isn't backing down

BY **SAMANTA HELOU HERNANDEZ**

Q1: *Orange Is the New Black gave you your most notable role to date—Maritza Ramos, one of Litchfield Penitentiary's original inmates. On the show's final season, which debuted on Netflix in July, Ramos is deported to Colombia, mirroring what happened to your parents nearly two decades ago, when you were 14 years old. How did you prepare for those scenes?*

GUERRERO: I didn't have to look far to understand what it would be like for my character to be in jail once again, to be taken away. I know what that's like. My mom was taken in handcuffs to the airport and loaded up on a plane. It's something I've lived with my entire life. It's desperate; it's lonely. So I tried to go back to that time. Honestly, because of the work I'm doing today, I'm back there all the time. It was cathartic.

Q2: *So it wasn't retraumatizing?*

GUERRERO: No, no, no. What's retraumatizing is knowing that some fucking guy went to a Walmart and shot up people because he thought there was an invasion of Mexicans, because of what our president has said. *That's* retraumatizing. That instills fear in me that my life can be taken away at any time. Portraying it artistically, or even retelling my story, as hard as that is at times, is a means to an end. That's not retraumatizing.

Q3: *You revealed your parents' deportation in a 2014 op-ed piece in the Los Angeles Times, and in 2016 you released a memoir, In the Country We Love, about growing up in the U.S. without them. What motivated you to share your story and become an activist for immigration reform?*

GUERRERO: My career was moving very fast, but I felt I wasn't being honest. I felt deceitful not speaking about something that was very real to me. The issue of immigration was being tossed around inaccurately, and Trump was using the immigrant community as a scapegoat. What do you do when your community is flat-out labeled as rapists and murderers, and people run with that narrative? I couldn't offer a general response as a person of color, as a brown woman. I had to be like, "Yo, as a child of a separated family, as a child coming from a marginalized community that often experiences incarceration...I'm speaking to you as a child who lived all of this." I wanted people to look at me, see me and know what the fuck I'm about.

Q4: *How did you find a space to inhabit in this country?*

GUERRERO: If your circumstances bring you to a place where someone has to be charitable to you, you develop a habit of wanting to be invincible out of needing to appease folks. I got to the point of wanting to kill myself; that's how invincible I wanted to get. I had to see a therapist, who told me that it was okay to want things and to have dreams. I had to change the way I was programmed by reciting affirmations that I was worthy. That's how I began, little by little, to take up space again. But it's a work in progress. I work every day to not shrink myself, to allow myself to speak freely in places I'm scared to speak.

Q5: *In August you told Vanity Fair that you feared becoming a "poster child of deportation." Do you feel that you have?*

GUERRERO: No, I don't. I thought people were trying to pigeonhole me. In reality, only you can pigeonhole yourself. Only you can allow people to put you in a box. I am who I am. I care about what I care about. I'm strong in my convictions. I dictate my future. I dictate my outcome. Deportation, what happened to my family, is a sliver of who I am and what has happened to me. I have much more to say, much more to contribute.

Q6: *In 2015 you were named to the Obama administration's inaugural class of Presidential Ambassadors for Citizenship and Naturalization, which aimed to promote naturalization among some 8 million qualified people. But some immigration groups have called Barack Obama the "deporter in chief." How is what's happening now under President Donald Trump different from what happened under the previous administration?*

GUERRERO: The rhetoric isn't the same. Look, the Obama administration deported



People need each other. They need their families. That's what the American dream is all about.



a lot of families, but Obama also tried to implement immigration reform, and he was shut down. He didn't have the Senate and the House. He tried to enact an executive order and it was blocked by the courts. He was on his own. I understand that. I'm not at all saying that separating families is okay. He just didn't have the support.

Q7: *Your advocacy includes volunteering with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center and sitting on the board of directors of Mi Familia Vota, an organization that promotes civic engagement. What does common-sense immigration reform look like to you?*

GUERRERO: We update the visa system. Have we tried to set up a path to citizenship for people who are here, who have been here for years and who have supported the economy? No. Reform involves repealing laws that are hurting people. It means coming up with ways to keep our borders secure but which also create a new way forward. It does not mean deporting 11 million people and collapsing our economy. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is a relatively new thing. We don't need ICE. We don't need another agency going after families, putting them in jail solely to have higher body counts in these centers. We don't need to be putting money into this agency. Immigration is not a crime.

A lot of immigrant families are taken advantage of because we don't know our rights. I joined the Immigrant Legal Resource Center because it focuses on education. As soon as I educated myself, I felt more powerful. I could give information to folks and direct them in a healthier way. Compare that to my parents, who hired the first bozo who offered to help them with their visas. The immigration system is convoluted and made for people to misunderstand. I just try to be a portal for information and get it out there to the folks who need it.



Q8: *Speaking of ICE, in August, on the first day of school, authorities arrested 680 people suspected of working in the country illegally across seven Mississippi food-processing plants. Videos of children crying made the rounds online and sparked debates about coverage of this issue. Some argue that it's important for the public to see this kind of imagery. Others deem it exploitative and a form of trauma porn. What's your take?*

GUERRERO: People need to see it. Honestly, it was the first time I saw an image of what I felt like the day I came home and my folks weren't there. I don't know if I felt validated, because it's difficult

saying that; I know these kids are suffering. But I felt like that's what I've been trying to tell people. That's what it feels like. It's your first day of school. You love your parents. You wish they were there with you. We need to continue sharing images like those. I go through a lot not having my parents here. They're getting older. I'm getting older. I'm missing a lot of their milestones, and they're missing mine. That stunts your growth, in a way. People need each other. They need their families. That's what the fucking American dream is all about.

Q9: *Do you still believe in the American dream?*

GUERRERO: Of course. There are so many great things about this country and so many opportunities to be had. Equality for all and justice for all: That's the American dream I want to live, where everyone is treated fairly, where families are able to stay together, where this country provides what it promises for all families—not just white families and the families at the top. That's what I'm working toward. I mean, what else am I going to do?

Q10: *Is it possible for your parents to come back to the U.S. legally?*

GUERRERO: I would love for them to. This is where it all began. This is where our life started, and I would like to finish it here with them.

Q11: *You play Crazy Jane on DC's TV series Doom Patrol, whose second season premieres on HBO Max this spring. Crazy Jane experiences childhood trauma and develops superpowers as a result. What superpowers have you developed?*

GUERRERO: Becoming someone else. Here's an example: In college, I told someone that my parents were business owners, that they were in Colombia on a business venture and I was just here studying political science because I was interested in social justice and wanted to become a lawyer. The real reason I wanted to become a lawyer was so I could bring my parents back. In terms of relating to Jane, when she allows herself to work with others and surrender to community, she finds light in that. It's similar to when I surrender to my feelings and working with others and my community.

Q12: *Have you ever felt tokenized in your career?*

GUERRERO: Yeah, in auditions for "Drug Dealer Girlfriend Number One" and "Maid Number Two." That still happens. That's why being on *Doom Patrol* and getting the role of Crazy Jane has meant so much to me. To have a Latinx land a role normally reserved for a white person?





Latinxs aren't allowed to be superheroes. It's the strangest thing that we can't be seen in fantasy situations. Only white people can be in fantasies? Only white people can be superheroes? That's fucking preposterous.

Q13: *Crazy Jane also has dissociative identity disorder. There aren't many pop-culture representations of mental health issues in Latinx communities. You've struggled with depression, right?*

GUERRERO: Hey, we have mental health issues. This happens in our community. This needs to be looked at. If that goes overlooked, that person is going to spend a long time trying to figure it out. Who knows where they may or may not end up? What if my parents had seen a show or movie where they talked about that? We are so informed by what we watch and what's out there and available to us. That's why we have to fight to be in these spaces.

Q14: *Describe a moment when you realized what it means to be Latinx in Hollywood.*

GUERRERO: I mean, just go out there and try to get a job. Get a job, and then try to get paid as much as your counterparts. That's when you realize you're not on the same playing field. Or you think you have an opportunity to work with a producer who says they're interested in your story, or interested in telling more immigration stories or stories that impact the Latinx community, and then you get an e-mail from this person and it starts with, "Hey, babe." That's when you realize, "Oh, I am a woman. I am a brown woman." This is still going on, and that's still something I have to fight.

Q15: *Singing, not acting, was your introduction to performing. What does music signify to you?*

GUERRERO: It's how I stay alive, man. I love singing. I haven't done it in a professional setting yet, but it's coming. Music has saved me. It's the way I connect to my ancestry, to my family. Every Sunday, my family used to put on music, clear out the furniture and dance in the living room. What those songs were saying meant something.

Q16: *Like many Latinx people born in the 1980s, you listened to a lot of Selena growing up. What does she represent to you?*

GUERRERO: She represented the new Latin American, right? A person who was connected to her culture and could express herself so deeply but could also be very American—a mash-up of two beautiful things. It's what I've always considered myself: a mash-up of everything wonderful. I could speak Spanish. I could enjoy all these beauties that my culture offered, like music, dance, food and language. But I could also enjoy American music, American food and American customs. I could fucking bring those all together and just be a superhero.

Q17: *What's your favorite Selena song?*

GUERRERO: "No Me Queda Más," of course. The most intense, just mad emo song.

Q18: *You've said that growing up you tried to be the good girl to the point of harming yourself if you thought you were sinning. You're now perceived to be a sex symbol. When did you embrace your sexuality?*

GUERRERO: It wasn't until very recently. I've always been sexual, but it was once something I tried to hide because I was afraid of falling into the stereotype of the sexualized Latina who thought she could get anywhere with her sexuality or fuck her way out of any situation. I have been able to fuck myself out of a couple of situations, but that is not my go-to. My go-to is my brain and my heart and what I've learned from my family and community. That is how I've gotten ahead.



Q19: *Do you feel your activism has ever been discounted because of your sex appeal?*

GUERRERO: Latinas especially are not allowed to be sexual and smart at the same time. It wasn't until after I wrote my book that I allowed myself to feel sexy and say, "Fuck it. I don't care what you say about my breasts. I don't care about what you say about how I look." Being comfortable with my sexuality is a part of me and in the message I want to give to people about loving themselves. It all goes into how I felt about my brown skin growing up, feeling that it was ugly or less than. "A wide nose—your indigenous nose—is ugly. Your brown eyes aren't as interesting as blue ones." Shut off the noise that tells you you're not good enough or white enough, that your sexy is bad, that your sexy is crass in some way.

Q20: *When do you feel most alive?*

GUERRERO: When I'm singing or dancing. When I'm experiencing music through my veins. When I'm eating my mother's food. When those beans hit my mouth and just, I know what that is. It's life, you know? A life force for the heart.

new year's **revolution**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
HEATHER HAZZAN





JANUARY PLAYMATE

January Playmate **Riley Ticotin** has acted (with J.Lo), danced (with castanets) and earned a black belt in karate (watch out for the nunchucks). But her greatest strengths are far more profound—and inspiring

To me, equality means equal representation. In this industry, the conventions we see over and over give power to that little voice in your head that tells you you're not *enough:* not thin enough, not blonde enough, not good enough. Regardless of ethnic background, size, height or style, you should never be told you don't belong because you aren't the right "fit." Everyone belongs. Everyone fits.

I was raised on the border of Agoura and Calabasas—the infamous Calabasas, thanks to the Kardashians, but where I grew up is nothing like that. It was really chill: flips-flops and jean shorts all day, all year long. My parents put me in karate class when I was a toddler, and when I was a little older my mom put me in flamenco dance classes—castanets and heels one night, gis and belts the next! I haven't had much occasion to use my black belt, but whipping out nunchucks is still my favorite party trick.

Both my parents work in the movie industry, so like everyone else in L.A., I said, "I'm going to be an actress when I grow up!" I started to go on auditions and landed my first job at 15, in a Gillette Venus razor commercial. It wasn't till I'd booked the job that I learned J.Lo was going to star in it. That was next level—a little Puerto Rican girl in southern California in a commercial with Jennifer Lopez, the Puerto Rican queen!

So I started my career on a high note—but about six months later, I had a stylist tell me I was too fat and she couldn't dress me. That was before I could even vote for president.

Back then, I was going to all these castings with really skinny girls, and I wasn't booking the jobs. I wasn't *them*. When I turned 18 and officially became a curvy model, I thought, Why didn't anyone offer me this in the beginning? Why was straight-size modeling the only way? Being a curvy model is not an "alternative," like, "Oh, I tried to be skinny, but I gained weight and couldn't lose it, so I became a plus model." It's a natural size, and it's just as great as any other. I love seeing so many more girls in the game now. You can just be a curvy model, without doing the whole "I starved myself and it didn't work" thing.

Yes, things have changed, but the industry still has a long way to go—with race just as much as body type. When I go to castings, I'm always told I'm not Latina enough or I'm not white enough because I'm mixed race. It's frustrating that Hollywood still adheres to stereotypes when imagining a role. My sister, who still acts, says, "All my auditions are for super-sexy and kinkster characters, and I have to speak in Spanish or with a Spanish accent." We didn't grow up speaking Spanish at home. My sister failed Spanish class!

Every day I'm on set, someone wonders aloud about my ethnicity. When they ask, "Where is your family from?" I say, "America." When they ask, "What are you?" I just say, "Human."

Taking what I've learned in the industry, I'd love to someday become an art director or a casting director. That being said, there's still a lot I'd like to accomplish as a model, because there's power in representation. I never thought it was important for someone like me to be in PLAYBOY, but I hope some 15-year-old girl, crying because she doesn't look like what she sees in the media, sees me and says, "I'm okay."















BIRTHPLACE: Calabasas, California **CURRENT CITY:** New York City, New York

ON ROLE MODELS

I've admired Frida Kahlo ever since I got my bachelor's degree in art history. At first I fell in love with her use of color, but as I learned about the trials and tribulations of her life, I found her whole journey really inspiring. She was unapologetically herself.

ON OPTIMISM

I just finished *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus. Since then, my perspective on life has changed entirely. Even though we don't necessarily believe that Sisyphus enjoys constantly pushing a boulder up a hill, I imagine him as happy. That was his task, and it worked out for him. Everything will work out; everything is fine.

ON GUILTY PLEASURES

I'm obsessed with *Love Island,* the U.K. version. I'm so deep into it, I find that I'm starting to use their slang. I'm saying things like "Oh man, he really mugged me off!" And I have to remind myself, You're from California, Riley. You can't say that.

ON FANGIRL FAVORITES

I'm obsessed with Rosalía. I was listening to her before she really made it big. When she came out hip-hopping to flamenco, I thought, This is *amazing*. I literally learned the choreography to her music videos. I haven't done that since I was obsessed with Britney Spears as a kid.

ON SIGNS

I don't know if you've picked up on it, but I'm very Sagittarius. We like to travel, learn and do our own thing. I'm independent almost to a fault; being a "team player" is not really my strong suit. Some of my friends may tell you I'm a sore loser, but I just prefer to operate solo.

ON FEAR

I hate lizards. I *really* hate lizards. Any lizard, even the small ones in California that scurry past you on the sidewalk. Just the thought of them—I have goose bumps on my arms now.

ON ART

I could talk about 17th century baroque paintings—specifically the differences between Dutch, French and Italian baroque paintings—for hours! That's what I wrote my thesis on in college.

ON GOALS

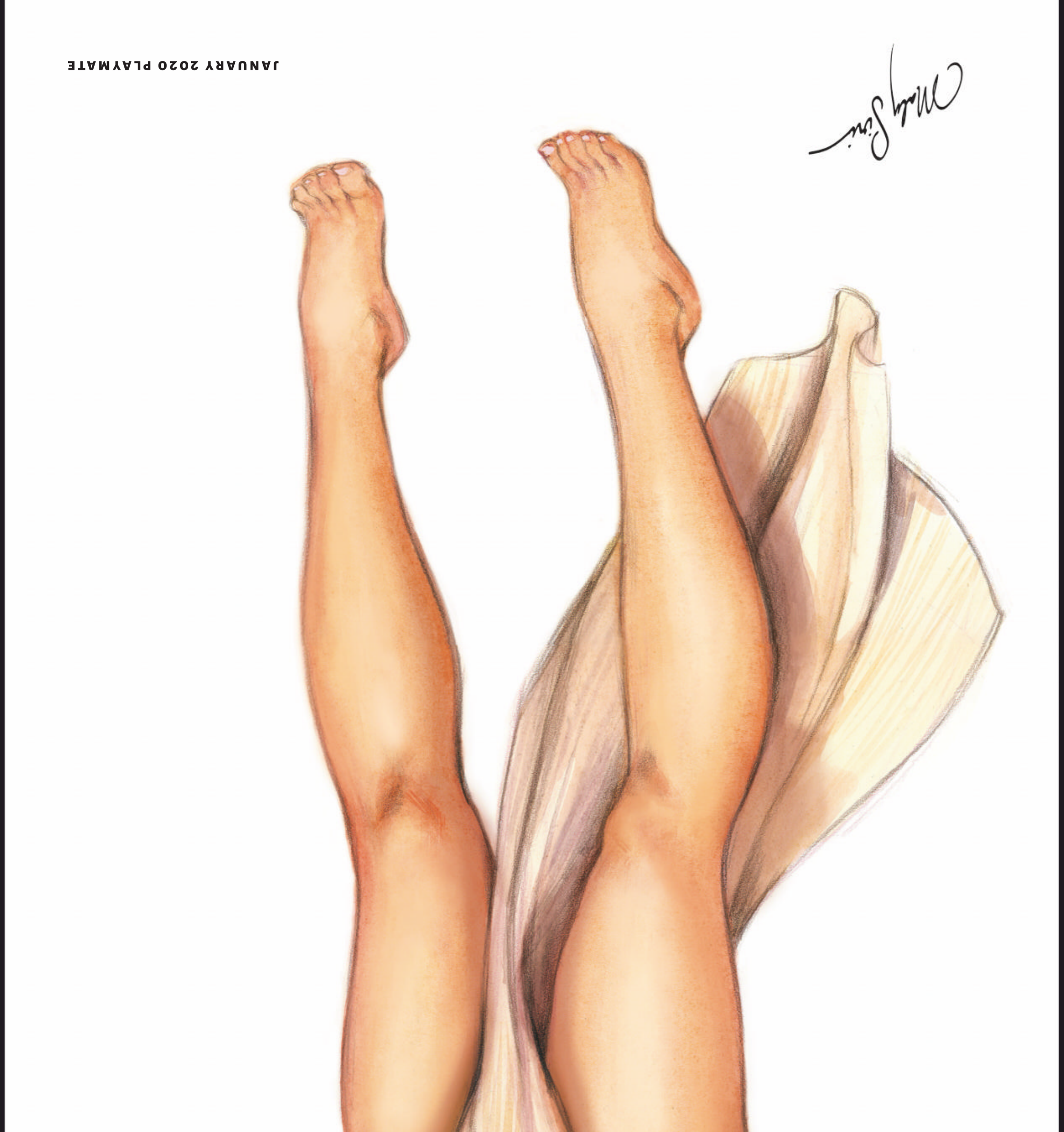
Another college fun fact: I really wanted to be a spy. I thought, I have a martial arts background, I'm ethnically ambiguous, I can learn Chinese.... My friends joke that modeling could be my spy cover story. Or maybe it already is—I wouldn't be allowed to say. Maybe I'm the first Playmate spy—or maybe I'm not even the first!






JANUARY 2020 PLAYMATE





MAIS OUI, IT WAS

AN AFFAIR FOR THE AGES—

MIDDLE AND OLD



FICTION BY

CLAIRE LOMBARDO

Technically speaking, he was old enough to be her father, but she'd always preferred a looser interpretation of things. Wiggle room, either/or, mucking around in the gray areas. *Janey of the variegated existential guidelines.* Prickle of his appreciative gaze, brief argument about the definition of *variegated.* An electric fence surrounded her memories of those days.

He appeared only vaguely fatherly when he arrived at her door that May morning: clean-shaven skull, scruff everywhere else; ambiguously licentious smile; thinner than she remembered. Thinner than she.

"I suppose I buried the lede," she said, blushing, smiling, looking down. She hadn't been able to bring herself to tell him over the phone.

"Janey," he said. "Well, God, you're beautiful." He reached for her hand, still standing on the front stoop. "Who's in there? When's she arriving?"

"A girl," she validated. "Mid-July."

"Mazel tov," he said, leaning in, kissing her cheek. There was something about her bulge that made all of this okay, allowed them to be more openly intimate than they'd ever been. She was a marked woman, had that strange virginal aura despite the contrary implications of her belly. She felt her face heating up; she was unaccustomed to his boldness. "Why on earth did you say I could stay here, then?" he asked. "You're nesting. You're preparing for new life."

"I can multitask," she said.

He smiled at her. "I've missed you."

If she wanted, she could have ridden on the vibes of this for weeks.

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It isn't some sordid, twisted tale of fatherless teen falling for comely-and-sex-starved vaguely paternal figure. She is 24 when it happens, and it doesn't end up being much of anything in the long run, not by cinematic standards.

She answers an ad that Clara has placed in the lobby of the World Literature department office: *Seeking date-night sitter.* Her rent has just been raised, and Clara has nice, temperate handwriting, and she is seized with the notion that maybe caring for young children will make her feel like more of an adult.

Clara is a professor of French literature, and her husband, Charlie, is a playwright. Their boys, at the time, are lanky charming moppets, ages seven and 12. Jane drifts easily into their lives. Gus likes to cuddle with her in his bed before he falls asleep, listening to her tell outlandish stories about dogs who are employed as doctors and secretaries. Léo sits with her at the kitchen table after his little brother goes to bed, telling her about his extracurricular geology club and the trip he's trying to get his parents to take them on to Alaska. Clara and Charlie return from their dates in high spirits, bringing a warm, boozy breeze with them as they enter through the kitchen. Once, Charlie offers Jane his leftovers and Clara swats at his shoulder with her handbag.

"That's repulsive," she says and hands over an elaborately boxed mousse she has ordered specifically for Jane. Her foresight touches Jane deeply.

Translators of French literature, even those who are world-renowned, are not a particularly affluent breed—and neither, of course, are playwrights—but they both come from some modest family money, and everything about their life strikes Jane as impossibly glamorous, their palatial old house and their quiet shiny cars and their skin that seems to stay subtly bronzed even through the eight annual months of Chicago gray.

At this point, it has been six years since Jane's father moved to Ojai to marry a meticulously coiffed kindergarten teacher and two years since she has returned home to visit her mother, a corporate litigator with a penchant for chenin blanc and verbal abuse. She is well aware that she is a textbook case of something but chooses not to examine things too closely. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in contemporary German literature, a field in which she is largely unaccompanied. She lives in a one-bedroom fifth-floor walk-up in Pilsen, a neighborhood that has yet to be gentrified by the proximate university and one in which she is afraid to walk alone at night. Charlie gives her a ride home when she babysits late, and it doesn't occur to her until later that this is an unusually illogical arrangement for Charlie and Clara, who live 15 miles north of downtown, in Evanston. Having a babysitter you have to drive home kind of defeats the purpose, but she never really considers Charlie's sobriety either, feels utterly safe as they glide along the *S* curves of Lake Shore Drive in his Audi.

"Tell me your story," he'll say to her warmly, turning down the music.

"I'm the most boring person on the entire earth," she'll reply, and he'll smile at her.

"Nice try. Make it up if you have to."

So she starts telling him, first embellished theatrical stories about her literature classes and the foosball-obsessed manboy she casually dated last year, and then more serious stuff, stuff about her parents' divorce, stuff about how lonely things feel sometimes. Charlie watches her steadily with placid graphite eyes, when he's not looking at the road, and sometimes he reaches over to pat her shoulder or give her a little hang-in-there punch on the thigh.

Each time he drives her home he sits parked in front of her building until she makes it upstairs and flicks her living-room lights on and off twice.

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Last month he'd called out of the blue—his voice on the phone startled her to such a degree that she'd had to sit down heavily in a kitchen chair—and asked if they had a spare room. A conference, he said, *keynote bullshit somethingorother,* and he'd love to see her. Three days, two nights. Just a stopover.

"Of course," she'd said, breathless, and it wasn't until hours after they'd ended the call that she realized it would have been polite to ask Greg if he minded having a guest.

During dinner his first night she rose frequently to serve them—insistently, because both Charlie and her husband had formidable Midwestern manners and Greg kept saying things like "Sweetie, you're making me feel like a Neanderthal." But she liked it, had always been fond of bustle and motion and order, neat rows of plates, even intervals of time between courses, wine that flowed freely only to a point.

ILLUSTRATION BY **SPIROS HALARIS**

It was strange to have them both at the table. Greg was a contractor, either the most or least likely mate for a woman who'd chosen such a fickle and weirdly intellectual field for herself. She'd met him at a friend's birthday party, and his proximity imbued her with an instant calm. He was a straight shooter. He was attuned to nuance but often chose to ignore it. She found this to be a refreshing change. He was kind to Charlie, a good host, jovial and inquisitive. Entirely unsuspicious, ostensibly, as Clara had been before it all started to go south.

She came out with a pie she'd baked—this, admittedly, had been somewhat of an affectation, because she and Greg never ate dessert and she didn't even like pie, but it seemed like an elegant, wifely thing to prepare; she'd even cross-hatched the crust, to dubious results.

"Jesus, Janey," Charlie said. "You realize I'm still wildly unimpressive, right? Is there someone else coming over? Who's deserving of this kind of hospitality?"

"Maybe I *am* nesting," she said, sitting back down, handing Greg a knife, reaching to pour herself an inch of wine. She allowed herself half a glass once a week. Tonight seemed as good a night as any.

"It looks incredible," Charlie said. "What kind is it?"

"Apple," she said, and then, a little self-consciously, "Jonagold. With salted caramel."

"You are not of this world," Charlie said, and before she could let the statement permeate her skeleton, Greg spoke up: "She's a wonder."

"She's sitting right here," she said without thinking, unfairly hostile, and the look Greg gave her made her feel a sickly guilt low in her esophagus. "Sorry," she said. "Charlie's awakening the latent unreasonable feminist within." She reached for Greg's hand under the table. "Collegiate nostalgia. I'm pining for the times when I was much prettier and much dumber."

"You weren't *that* dumb," Charlie said.

"You're more beautiful than the day I met you," Greg said, oppressively kind.

She reveled a little bit, the tolerantly exasperated mother: "Knock it off, both of you."

• • •

One night the Crosses have her over for dinner and Charlie is under the weather so he goes to bed early and she and Clara stay up until three on the back porch, drinking wine and listening to Curtis Mayfield.

"I live in a cave," Clara says, against the ironic backdrop of their gorgeous Queen Anne in the middle of the suburban wilderness. "Testosterone bleeds through the wiring and the foundation is composed entirely of dirty socks." She rests her head back and Jane watches, rapt by her confidence, her material comfort, her existential security. "Hold off while you can," she continues, rolling her wine around at the bottom of her glass. "Go do wonderful things first before you do any of this."

"This seems kind of wonderful," Jane says shyly, emboldened by the wine.

Clara smiles at her. "It is. Sure. Of course. Kind of. But it's not—don't ever be fooled into thinking I've achieved any kind of anything, okay? I have a husband I adore and two kids who mean everything to me. But you can have that too. We can all have *that*. It's the other things that are harder to come by."

Emboldened still, Jane allows herself to be a little bit offended by this. "I don't think it's so easy for all of us to find husbands we adore," she says. "Or ones who adore us back."

She isn't sure if Clara knows about her parents. Charlie knows, in great detail, owing to a night a few months earlier when the Cubs made it to the playoffs and traffic was at a standstill, but the disclosure arrangement in their marriage is still unclear to Jane.

"Well, that's true," Clara says, reaching over and squeezing her wrist. "That's absolutely true. Usually the man you'd leap off a bridge for when you're 25 doesn't turn out to be the one who you wake up next to when you're pushing 50." Clara pours them both more wine and sighs. "And if that does happen to you—I mean, the odds that you're still always happy to be waking up next to them are—well, Charlie would say *negligible* is too fatalistic a term."

"This isn't the most inspiring conversation," Jane ventures.

Clara laughs. "All I'm suggesting is that you wait, if you can. This is lovely. Truly. All of it ends up being lovely, sometimes."

"Are you saying that Charlie…." She stops. She'd watched Charlie and Clara together, had earlier that evening seen the man nibble casually at his wife's neck when he thought no one was looking; she had been playing rummy with the boys in the living room, but she'd cut through the kitchen to use the bathroom. On some dark nights, alone nights when she is horny and maligned, she pictures them together: the wiry electric man who'd once pulled over on a side street to make her listen to a "Hello, Goodbye" B-side, pumping over his sun-kissed, formidable wife, working a lizard tongue into the crook of her neck, parting the lips of her sex with fingers he used to drum deftly on the steering wheel. She's pictured him driving Clara to the hospital when she was in labor with Gus or Léo, counting her breaths, mopping her brow. She's pictured them sitting on their porch pre-sunrise, maybe up early or maybe still awake from the night before, Clara's feet in his lap or their bodies twined together in a chaise longue; she's pictured them tending together to one of their feverish children; she's pictured them falling into bed at the end of a long day.

But to see them like that—close and offhanded, Charlie teasing and Clara pretending to be annoyed, nudging past him to reach for the pepper grinder, *hands to yourself, mister*—well, it had stirred something in her, something that's painful to think about too hard, something that makes her bristle at the thought of Charlie straying, even straying with her, Jane, though that has been the subject of her most lewd fantasies for months.

"Charlie's crazy about you," she says.

Clara laughs and sips her wine. "Sure he is," she says. "Sometimes."

She can't think of anything to say and this seems to give Clara pause. She reaches over and squeezes Jane's knee.

"I'm lucky; you're right," Clara says. "Look at me, aiding in the disillusionment of a minor."

Jane spends the night in one of their three guests rooms, where the bed is a cumulus cloud and the pillows smell like jasmine.

• • •

"Is she doing okay, at least?" she asked, sitting with him on the back porch the next morning, before Greg awakened. He and Clara were taking some time apart, he'd told her. Nothing serious. A breather.

"Oh, Christ, yes," Charlie said. "She's having a blast. She just got back from three weeks in Abu Dhabi."

"Alone?"

Charlie looked at her slyly, smirking. "With a few of her friends."

"Ah."

"Platonic, PTA-mom type of friends. She hasn't turned on me quite so far. Not yet."

"I didn't mean——"



"No, she doesn't have a *man,* Janey; not as far as I can tell. Which struck me as odd at first because—I mean, she *could,* easily, don't you think?"

"Absolutely," Jane said. Clara was gorgeous in that kind of timeless, graceful way, beauty without effort, the kind that radiated from naturally unclogged pores. And it extended beyond the physical—beyond her honey twist of hair, beyond the lively softness of her body (not fat but fully inhabited, a body that boasted both its childbearing abilities and an affinity for pastries; its fondness for vigorous walks along the river and days spent reading beneath afghans). Clara glowed. She exuded goodness.

Jane cleared her throat. "Do you think it—I mean, with Clara. Is it—is there a chance that you'll...."

"Oh, sure." He crossed his ankle over his knee and leaned his head back. "We'll work it out. Don't worry about us. Is that a creek in your backyard?"

"*Mm.*" She folded her legs beneath her, rested her cheek against the cool wicker of the loveseat. "Pure Michigan. We're landowners now; hadn't you heard?"

"I'm happy for you," he said, a little sadly.

"Nothing you don't have already." She wasn't sure how to talk to him without flirting.

"You deserve all this," he said. "You've always deserved good things."

"Ditto," she said, and he smiled at her across the porch.

"Those undergraduate delinquents are rubbing off on you."

"Maybe."

"You teaching this summer?"

"Absolutely not," she said.

"Too busy gestating, I suppose?"

"Actually I'm planning on learning how to hang glide."

"My adventuress," Greg said from the doorway. His face was puffed with the lines of his pillow but he'd changed into jeans, she supposed because of Charlie. He joined them outside, bent to kiss her before he sat down beside her on the loveseat. "Wow, coffee?"

She could feel his gaze, so she focused instead on the dark liquid in her mug, espresso roast with a pinch of cinnamon, Charlie's secret ingredient. The caffeine was getting to her more than she was willing to admit, making a fizzy feeling in her veins. She pressed a hand subtly to her throat to feel her pulse.

"It's my fault," Charlie said. "She protested, but I——"

"Clara never gave up caffeine," Jane said. "And Gus is starting at Harvard in the fall."

"Well, in that case," Greg said. She could hear the effort behind his nonchalance.

"Just one cup," she said. She smiled at him. She reached over and took his hand.

• • •

It's okay for her to drink so much wine with Clara that she has to sleep over. A precedent has been set. She is invited to Gus's belt tests at the karate studio and Léo's Northwestern Astronomy Bowl competitions. When she babysits in the afternoons and takes the Purple Line home, all family members hug her good-bye.

But Charlie still drives her when it's dark out, and it's on one of those nights that she asks him in for a glass of wine. He and Clara have been at a university-wide memorial service for one of Clara's esteemed and prematurely cancer-stricken colleagues—Josephine Grimes; she'd glimpsed the name in the Dearly Departed section of the *University Circle* newsletter on their mail table—and they are both notably sober afterward. Clara doles out Jane's pay with a desultory exhaustion and leans in to kiss her dryly on the cheek.

"You're a doll," she says. "I have to either go slit my wrists or take an Ambien."

"So long as you're only dead to the world when I return," Charlie says, cupping a hand to his wife's face and kissing her, more affectionate than normal. "You sure you're okay?" he whispers, their faces close, and Jane has to look away.

"I'm fine. Just sad. Take Janey home." Clara looks over at her and winks. "Make her regale you with stories of the innocence of youth."

They drive the LSD stretch in silence, the tinny thump of a

Replacements album playing softly from the stereo. Jane rests her forehead against the window and watches the glittered blur of the lake in the reflection of the glass, and at one point Charlie reaches over and pats her shoulder.

"Clara and I are humbled by our own mortality tonight, I'm afraid," he says. "It's a thing that'll start to happen to you eventually."

When he pulls up in front of her house she turns to him as if to say good-bye but instead she says, "I'm sure it's not quite up to your standards, but I've got wine if you'd like some."

It's actually a relatively pricey bottle by her standards, $15.99 at the sketchy Jewel-Osco on Roosevelt and Wabash. She'd purchased it that morning without quite knowing why.

"A hundred-something academics in a chapel," he says. "And no booze to be found for miles. What kind of send-off is that? I wanted to bring a flask but Clara said it was disrespectful."

"Well."

"I'd love some of your low-brow wine," he says, and they're both silent as he circles the block a few times looking for parking.

Inside she tries to seem confident and autonomous, proud of her sparsely furnished 1980s architecture. He's winded from five flights of ascension and she politely turns her back to him as she opens the wine.

"To Josephine Grimes," he says when she's poured it. "Christ, that's crass, isn't it?" he amends, withdrawing his glass.

"Why?" She pushes hers toward him. "To Clara," she says, and he gives her a sad smile, the kind you give a kid who's just asked when they can go visit the dog on his new farm.

"And that, my darling," he says, "is the dictionary definition of the word."

"I didn't——"

"To you," he says. "To lithe, lovely Jane, our saint and savior."

She clinks to that and leads him into the living room, where the lighting is better. It begins awkwardly, which reassures her, lulls her into the false sense of everything being aboveboard and allowed. They sit beside one another on the couch, not on opposite ends but together toward the middle, knees practically touching.

"Thanks for having me," he says. "I needed a little break."

"Of course." Her voice cracks.

"I hope I'm not——" he says, and she replies, teasingly, "Not *what*?"

She isn't sure where to place her hand. Over his dick? In the dick region? Is it okay to call it a dick when it has been used to electively father offspring who aren't yours? He solves the problem by twining his fingers through hers, holding her hand in the upside-down V of his rib cage over his belly.

"I never do this," he says, like a sigh.

"Sit on a couch?"

"I need you to not be coy."

"Me either," she replies, and it's then that she rests her head against the worn warmth of his shoulder, fitting the bones of her cheeks and jaw around his pointy protrusion where humerus meets scapula. "You don't have to," she says. "To be honest I'd probably like you more if you didn't."

"I like you," he says. "Very much."

"Ditto," she says.

He leans his head back and she can feel his bones rearranging themselves beneath her cheek. "Isn't this one hell of a cliché."

"Well, I don't know about——"

"But there is a chemistry thing happening here, is there not?"

"I can't explain it," she says. "I have this thing about men in their 50s who give it to me straight."

"Some may call that a father complex," he says.

"Fuck you," she says, and she laughs, but it's the kind of laugh that is 40 percent crying, and he moves closer to her, rearranging her legs, lifting the heft of her ass so it's tilted against his thigh. He bends over unnaturally to kiss her forehead, then her mouth, then her neck, and then her mouth again.

HE BENDS OVER UNNATURALLY TO KISS HER FOREHEAD, THEN HER MOUTH, THEN HER NECK AND THEN HER MOUTH AGAIN.

• • •

She was awake when Greg came to bed, reading by penlight like an adolescent at summer camp.

"I thought you'd be deep in REM by now," he said. He undressed quickly, neglected to brush his teeth, and slid in beside her, fitting the length of his body along the length of hers and tucking his chin against her neck.

"I was, for a while," she said. "Your daughter has the hiccups."

"Oh yeah?" He sounded intrigued.

She ruffled idly at his hair. Their baby did not have the hiccups; their baby was, in fact, sleeping soundly at a remarkably convenient time when Jane wished to be sleeping herself. But she squirmed against her husband and put her hand low on her belly and wrinkled her nose.

"For the last 20 minutes," she said, and Greg put his hand beside hers, rubbed around in little circles, trying to feel.

"I can't find them," he said. His breath in her ear still always awakened something between her legs. She pushed her thighs together and sighed.

"Sort of a little to the left," she said, and she felt his hand follow her instructions. "Not so left. And a little bit down. No, not—yeah, but not—a tiny bit to the right."

He was so compliant. She almost felt bad.

"You honestly can't feel that?" She felt him stiffen against her, alert now, on a mission. His fingers palpated her belly. She worried it would wake the baby, already a casualty to something Jane was unwilling to articulate.

"Sort of," he said after a minute, and the lie broke her heart. She relaxed against him and laced her fingers through his, both now feeling for the fabricated extraterrestrial movements.

"Probably just gas," she said.

"Talk dirty to me," he said, and she laughed, and as they lay in the dark she felt him fall asleep, felt his breath slow and his body slacken, and a few minutes after that the baby awakened with such vigor that eventually she had to extract herself from his embrace, go for a walk around the backyard, a hand bolstering her belly, thinking, *Please just calm down; I promise you that everything is going to be all right.*

Eventually she wandered back inside and drifted off in the armchair in her office. She dreamed that she was making out with one of her students beneath the cypress tree in the Crosses' backyard. She dreamed that all her teeth crumbled out of her mouth. She dreamed she was on a boat with Greg and Charlie attacked them from behind, overturning the vessel and sending them both plunging underwater. She dreamed that she was lactating dark roast, using her space-age new breast pump, the funnel channeling the liquid directly into her mouth.

• • •

He has an exotic, gorgeous wife and yet for some reason he falls for Jane, boring, beige Jane with the worst shade of dirt-brown hair and a body that isn't skinny in any of the right places, slow-on-the-uptake Jane who normally has great difficulty making casual conversation.

"Get yourself some wine," she says, and when he starts to the kitchen she adds, "but come kiss me first." He comes over sometimes, now, when he's not driving her home, stops by on his way to or from his office with coffee or a pack of Dunhills or beignets from the dubious Creole place on Maxwell Street.

He comes to her and she clamps his thighs between her legs, pulling him closer, gripping him in the diamond of her knees. He bends his face down to hers and she catches his lips gently between her teeth, eliciting a moan that renders her momentarily reassured.

"You taste good," she says. "Something garlic."

He stands straight and studies her, smiling in his way, half amused. She realizes then, suddenly, that Clara had been at dinner with him. It shouldn't surprise her, nor is she allowed to be offended, but the knowledge opens up a little pit inside of her, an irritating ache like a menstrual cramp.

"Dinner. Faculty husband," he says, affirming.

She swallows hard and rubs the arch of her foot along his fly. "Don't just stand there," she says. "My sommelier."

She doesn't talk like this to anyone else in the world. The secret self flows from her like vomit. He touches his knuckles to her forehead for a second, and then he disappears into the kitchen, where she hears him uncorking the wine, setting down the glasses, unfurling the bag of chocolate-covered pretzels she'd bought on impulse. When he returns he smells of that instead, cocoa and sugar, and she lifts her legs onto the back of the couch to make room. He sits beside her and she lowers her legs into his lap, taking her glass, careful not to jostle his. She'd worried to him last week that she thought she was developing a bunion. He strokes the red knuckle now with the pad of his thumb.

"It's those boots," he says.

"I look stumpy otherwise."

"You could never."

He tells her sometimes that she should be indulging the young men who are surely knocking down her door when he's not around but what he doesn't seem to get is that those men don't exist, that she is for whatever reason only capable of inciting the amorous attentions of those old enough to parent her, that her thighs are too melty for men in their 30s, that they don't respond well to the ruminative melancholy that overtakes her post-sunset.

Clara dresses practically, but with undeniable style, the confident ownership of a woman with a Ph.D. and plenty of money and an accomplished husband and a stable station in life, a big green house overlooking a naturally formed creek.

He presses at her arch, at the spaces between each of her toes. "You should get this looked at."

She flexes around his finger like a monkey, like an infant in sleep.

• • •

The wood for the crib arrived on Sunday, when Greg and Charlie were alone together and Jane was holding her office hours at the café on Devonshire. When she came home they were building it, not a crib from a box but one they were designing themselves, using Greg's blueprints. She watched them from afar for a moment. Her husband was formidable and confident, straight-spined, work-booted, damp at the armpits. She felt a twinge for him, his big shoulders and his mechanical mind and the pleasure he took from interacting physically with the world.

But then, beside him: It was the first time she noticed that Charlie's vulpine allure—the reedy brawn of his body that had so electrified her during their months together—had faded somewhat, melted into something almost—she flinched—geriatric.

"What on earth is all this?" she asked mildly, coming into the garage where they were both sweaty and hunched and listening to Led Zeppelin. Greg came over to kiss her. She rode it out for a couple extra beats, exhibitionism that was uncharacteristic for them both. Greg looked surprised. Charlie eyed them sideways and sipped indelicately from a Sierra Nevada.

"The balsa finally came," Greg said.

"You didn't tell me you'd married the most gifted carpenter since the Lord himself, Janey."

She looked at Charlie to assess the level of hostility in his voice, but his smile remained nervy and even. She put her hand on Greg's shoulder. "I don't like to brag," she said. Then: "Sweetie, it's gorgeous. Already. I can't wait to see it when it's finished."

"This is more manual labor than I've done in my entire life," Charlie said, but then his smile warmed slightly and he winked at her. "But it's all for a good cause."

She felt, weirdly, like she was going to cry, but it passed, just as the track changed on the stereo.

"Babe," Charlie twanged theatrically, suggesting that the beer was not his first. "Baby, baby, I'm gonna leave you." She'd read about incongruous arousal during the third trimester. She had not yet experienced it until that moment. He did a little bit of air-guitar finger-picking and then continued, ad-libbing, "Just as soon as I build this fucking ridiculously ornate cradle for your kid."

"Couple of craftsmen," she said, all she could muster.

Greg wove his arm around her waist and she took his hand beside the insurmountable swell of her belly.

• • •

She can't pinpoint specifically when Clara starts to look at her differently, but one day she notices that she's grown accustomed

to it, the little bit of tightness around the corners of her mouth as she smiles, a barely perceptible hardness in her eyes.

"Charlie's very fond of you," she says one day, when she and Jane are sitting on opposite ends of the living room couch, folding an immense pile of the boys' laundry.

She startles and tries to brush it off as a crick in her back. "Well," she says. "That's nice to hear. I'm fond of him."

Clara gives her the smile and she wonders how she hasn't seen it sooner.

"Is everything——" Clara falters and directs her attention to a pair of Gus's tiny Animaniacs briefs, social clumsiness that's unlike her. "Are you all right, Jane? Is everything okay with you?"

"How do you mean?" She feels a surge of existential gratitude for the fact that heartbeats are not audible outside of the body.

"You can—you can talk to me, I guess is all I'm saying," Clara says. "I hope you know that you can—if anything's going on...in your life, I mean; I hope you know that I'm around and I won't be—you've become a part of our family, and I'd like to think that we can trust each other." She meets Jane's eyes and holds her gaze.

"Of course," Jane says. "Yes. I mean, thank you. Of course I know. We can. Thanks."

Clara smiles again, just her ordinary mom-smile. "You don't have to thank me. I was just—you know, checking in."

"I broke up with my boyfriend," Jane blurts out. The lie has arisen from nowhere, sprung from the ether with startling ease. Clara looks startled.

"Oh," she says. "I didn't realize you were—you've never mentioned anyone."

"I guess I never thought of it." It is not specifically she who says this but the ether-person, the confident liar. "Maybe that should've been a sign."

"It could go both ways, I guess," Clara says. "We either hide things because we're ashamed or because we want to protect them. I had this wretched, laughable, Romeo and Juliet hostage situation with my high school boyfriend—we'd just spend all of our time in his basement. Pathetic. It seemed like sacrilege to share him with anyone else." She laughs. "But I'm sorry, Jane. That's—do you want to talk about it? How long were you together?"

"Almost two years."

"Well, God."

"It's fine," she says. "It was for the best, I guess."

"And yet you still seem...."

The liar stands up straight, an icicle along her spine. "Well," she says. "It's a little more complicated than that, actually."

• • •

"What do we do?" she asked. Charlie was cooking and she was washing dishes as he went, adopting a leisurely pace, leaning against the counter between pans. "When she's born? How are we supposed to—what, we're just allowed to take her home and—everything's copacetic?"

She watched the side of his face lift into a smile.

"It's the thing they never tell you," he said. "You're on your own. Isn't that something?"

"You two seemed to do okay."

"We had our moments," he said. "But the day we brought Léo home, God."

"Did something happen?" She rested a hand—wrapped damply in the dish towel—against her belly.

"Of course not. He cried. He nursed. He was thoroughly investigated by the cat."

"But you were okay?"

Charlie was quiet for a moment, scrubbing insistently at the eyes of a potato with the special brush that Greg had put on their wedding registry. "There was a moment," he said, "when he wouldn't stop crying, and Clara'd had an episiotomy and she could barely walk, and the frightening Unitarians next door were trying to bring us muffins and they were ringing the bell, and there was just this—there was just this extra *person,* suddenly, in our lives, Janey, and it was so fucking surreal that I started laughing. And Clara was standing with him over by the fireplace and she was hunched over like an old woman but the strangest thing was that she didn't *look* like an old woman; she looked about 12, for the first time since I'd met her, just holding this tiny screaming baby, and I——" He paused and she couldn't bring herself to reach over and turn off the faucet. It ran, insistently, a coursing stream down into the saucepan and over the mugs. "She didn't laugh, is the gist, I guess," he said finally. "She didn't find it funny and it was—she didn't laugh with me. Not the first time, certainly, but it felt—that felt seminal. That felt like a door closing."

Over the course of his telling her eyes had filled with tears and she wiped at them with the dish towel. Charlie regarded her evenly.

"It just changes things," he said, making no effort to comfort her. "Not necessarily in one direction or the other. It advances you to a parallel life. You just switch tracks." He shrugged, rifling through one of the drawers for a knife. "You guys'll be fine."

"So long as we find an ugly babysitter, right?" she said, suddenly aware of how fast her heart was beating, of how her breath made a sound when it pushed out of her nose.

Charlie smiled at her sadly. "Yes. Let her not be brilliant or charming or wildly dexterous, either, if you can manage."

Her face flushed. "A gay man, perhaps," she said with some amount of strain.

"An elderly homosexual child-minder," he agreed, laughing, and all was well again when Greg came in from the garage. She could see at once that he was ill, a cold maybe, pink around the eyes and shivering visibly. His hair was damp with sweat and sticking up on one side.

It flipped a nervous switch inside her, seeing him weakened like that.

"Sweetheart," she said, going to him, touching her hand to his cheek. "Oh, you're warm."

"It just hit me out of nowhere," he said. "You shouldn't come near me; we don't want you getting sick."

"They're a hearty bunch, the gravid," Charlie said from the sink.

She saw a flicker of irritation in her husband's eyes.

"She had bronchitis in her first trimester," Greg said. "It was hell for her."

"Honey," she said.

"At first I thought Janey was overreacting," Charlie said, "but you do have this tendency to talk about her like she's not in the room."

"Both of you, stop," she said. She touched Greg's shoulder. "Do you have to go to bed, sweetie? Charlie and I are making *dauphinois.*" She knew the way she curled her lips around the *ph* would drive Greg nuts.

"I feel like I'm going to pass out," Greg said. "You'd better eat without me."

"Let me tuck you in," she said.

• • •

She lets Clara Cross support her through a fake abortion. It is the second most fucked-up thing she will ever do to a person she loves.



"I actually had one between Léo and Gus," Clara says to her. "We've always had the testing done because I'm older and I—well, she—it was a girl; she would've had——" Here Clara chokes up a little, brushing at her eyes, leaving no traces of the indulgent eyeliner that Jane favors at the time. "They can test for those things, you know? Down's. And we just couldn't—I just couldn't—Léo was such a handful already and Charlie was gone all the time and I couldn't envision a way in which that was something that we could——" She composes herself and shakes her head. "I was 17 weeks. I was showing already. Luckily I've always had this," here she places a hand over her lower belly, the maternal paunch between her hipbones. "Luckily I've always had a little bit of extra weight, otherwise I would've told a lot more people and I would've had to explain it to——" Jane vows, in that moment, that she will never again allow Charlie to run his tongue along the fleshy, razor-burned skin of her upper thighs. He claims to love the halfhearted novelty of her grooming, professes that Clara hasn't done anything to her nether regions since she got pregnant with Léo. "I've never quite forgiven myself."

"I'm sorry," she says, and Clara takes her hand.

"It's really not as bad as it sounds," she says. "It's still early for you. You've got so much ahead of you. It's uncomfortable for a day. Then you're back into the swing of things."

And the next week she lets Clara pick her up before sunrise on a sickly Thursday morning and she rides in the passenger seat of the Volvo while Clara drives her to the most coveted student-insurance-accepted clinic in Edgewater, and she weeps, but not for the reasons that Clara is imagining. Clara sits in the lobby with a heavily pregnant blonde person to her right and Jane allows herself to be led into an exam room.

"Get undressed," the nurse instructs her, and she lies back with legs splayed as she undergoes her annual pap smear. For the first time in eight years, she wears the institutional pad they offer her for possible spotting.

Afterward Clara takes her to a Polar Bear in a nearby suburb and they eat frozen custard together sitting in the car parked beside the forest preserve.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Clara asks, and Jane shakes her head, but not too vigorously, because she is still recovering.

• • •

After dinner, after she checked on Greg—her husband sleeping soundly, NyQuilled and blanket-wrapped—she discovered Charlie sitting in the back, not on the porch but in the grass, legs spread before him, pale and hairy in the blue light of the moon.

"I don't want to scare you," she said.

"Never, my dear," he replied without turning, as though he'd known her to be there all along.

"Do you want to be alone?" she asked.

"Knowing there's an alternative?" He rose gracefully, springing his body up like a backward diver. "Absolutely not." He smiled at her. "I'm guessing the lady is averse to sitting in the grass these days?"

"Not averse," she said, settling herself in one of the Adirondack chairs. "Just incapable."

He sat beside her, bringing with him an absurdly filled tumbler of something brown. "Aren't you supposed to be sleeping?" he asked. "Confining? Languishing in the sprouting of your seed?"

"She has the hiccups," she said, which was again not precisely true at the moment.

"Can I feel?" he asked.

"Not now," she said. "I'm fat and heinous."

"You're gorgeous," he said. "You're aglow."

"That's the moon."

"It's not." He ran the arch of his foot along the length of her calf. "It's you."

"Knock it off," she said, hoping her voice didn't betray her

anxiety, the amount of pleasure that was still buzzing through her tibia.

"You'll name her after me, I assume?"

"Charlize," she said.

He laughed. "She's going to be invincible," he said. "I can't wait to meet her."

"Will you come back?" she asked, and she was embarrassed to hear her voice squeak. "When she's born?"

"Well, sure," he said, then: "I'll try."

"It would mean a lot to Greg," she said. "All of this is making him a little nervous. His parents both died years ago. We're lacking—" she swallows "—strong parental figures. Nice to have another dad around. A pro."

"And to you?"

"To me what?"

"Would it mean a lot to you?"

She stilled. Then, quietly, almost a whisper: "Yes."

"I'll see what I can do, then," he said.

She sat back and sighed, sipped her tea, shifted her weight. "Is it really happening?"

"I'd say so," he said, gesturing to her belly.

"You and Clara," she said. "Getting back together. Are you really—is it real?"

"It's complicated," he said finally.

"Is it ever not?"

"In this case, especially so."

"Because you're both still thinking about it or because——"

"Jesus, can you not sound like you're enjoying this so much?"

"I'm not," she said, hurt. "I'm really not. I'm curious."

"Voyeurism doesn't suit you," he said.

"I'm not being——"

"We're divorced."

"Oh."

"As of last month."

"Charlie." She reached in the dark for his hand, found it, damp from the condensation on his glass. She brought it up to her face, felt the hair on his knuckles brushing against her cheek, inhaled his smell into her nose.

"There was a——" He stopped. "A girl—a young woman, last year, and she—I mean, nothing ever—well, certainly not *nothing,* but it was——"

She tried to make an empathetic murmuring noise but it came out as a squeak.

"Nothing like you, Janey," he said. "It was stupid. I was stupid. She was helping out around my office. Clara came to bring me lunch one day and I——"

She realized that the latest pause was caused by his tears and she stiffened, his hand still near her mouth. She lowered it gently to the armrest of the chair and deposited it there like a baby bird. After a minute she spoke: "Well, I'd say something about cliché…."

He snorted.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"It's my own fault."

"Well."

"She'll be happier," he said. "The boys are almost out of the house and she's finally working on a book. She's planning a trip to Nice in the fall."

"Did she ever—with me, was she ever——"

"You're in the clear," he said.

"But the fellowship—the timing with the——"

"That was just Clara being Clara. She adored you. She wanted you to go forth and prosper. Which it seems you have. She'll be happy to know."

"You guys still talk?"

"Of course," he said, and the ease with which he spoke still sent a niggling spark down her spine. "Glass of wine on the sunporch every Sunday afternoon when I come to get my mail. Haven't been able to bring myself to forward it."

"But she never thought that I——"

"You're too pure, Janey. You're too good for all of that." He took her hand again. "We missed you, when you left. All of us."

She was not allowed to ask any of the most glaringly obvious questions: *Then why didn't you call? Why didn't she call? Why didn't the boys ever respond to my postcards?* Her parents all over again, almost, except that time she was the adulterer, living in a spacious sunlit loft in Berlin, reading Sebald and eventually finding German boys who were charmed enough by her American accent to disregard her shortcomings.

"Did you get another babysitter?" she asked instead.

He squeezed her hand twice. "Naah. You were irreplaceable. Plus Léo was old enough to take care of Gus by then. You trained them well for self-sufficiency."

"I really am sorry," she said absently.

"Oh, Janey. Knock it off." He took back his hand to wipe his eyes and she turned away, embarrassed for them both. "Just sit with me."

"She's kicking," she said, and Charlie turned to her, interested. "Come here."

He knelt at her feet so she could feel the heat from his T-shirt bleeding into her legs.

"Put your hand here," she said, but instead he laid the side of his face, resting the full weight of his head against her. The baby kicked hard—right, she estimated, into his cheekbone. "Do you feel that?" she asked. "She just kicked you in the face. She must have some of my genes, at least. I wonder if she——" But she stopped, then, because she felt a strange wetness on her

SHE CANNOT BRING HERSELF TO WASH THE GUEST ROOM SHEETS UNTIL SIX WEEKS LATER.

dress, a weird shuddering that was coming not from within her but from the outside, Charlie's head, his chest heaving a little against her knees.

"Oh," she said. She put a hand on his shoulder.

"I miss her," he said, and before she could stop herself she replied, "Me too."

• • •

The envelope arrives on a thawing Thursday in early May, thick and linen and intimidating. She opens it while perched on the edge of her couch, noticing one of Charlie's stray socks beneath the coffee table. A fellowship in Germany, six months, all expenses paid, on the recommendation of Dr. Clara Cross. She goes straight to the Halsted L stop and transfers halfway to the Purple Line, finally showing up on their doorstep, breathless and uninvited.

"It was my pleasure," Clara says. "You deserve it." Charlie is at work, she says, so they'll have to do their best to make a dent in the Veuve without his help. She opens the bottle deftly, a towel over the top to prevent the cork from flying. "Old restaurant trick," she says.

"I didn't know you waited tables."

"Seven years," Clara says. "While I was finishing my Ph.D." She regards Jane placidly over the champagne flutes.

There's a quiet that feels full of something that Jane can't bring herself to address.

"We shouldn't leave Gus alone for so long," Clara says, and the fullness has been acknowledged, and they carry their champagne onto the back porch, no Curtis Mayfield this time, just the sputtering of the automatic sprinklers and the lazy creak of Clara on the glider. Jane knows somehow to not sit beside her.

"You know, I misspoke," Clara says. Gus, running in frantic circles around the bursts of water, comes by to bury his face against his mother's knees. She ruffles his hair and smiles down at him, dips her neck to kiss the crown of his head before he sets off again. "It's work," she says. "All of this actually takes quite a great deal of—work." She stays quiet until Jane meets her eyes, and then she smiles a smile that makes Jane so sad she almost drops her glass. "We're going to miss you," Clara says.

But Jane can't reply because this time it's her turn to be greeted by Gus, who dives into her lap and sends a wave of champagne over her arm and into the geraniums.

• • •

He was hungover when she drove him to the lecture, breathing deliberately through his mouth, keeping his eyes closed against the sunshine.

"I don't mind doing this," she said, "but isn't it sort of odd that the college didn't handle your travel arrangements?"

"What?"

"At least a room at the Days Inn. Their endowment is huge, from what I hear."

She taught at the state university, which was neighbored by the tiny private college to which they were currently driving.

"Oh," he said. "Oh, you thought——"

"I thought what?"

"I'm—just visiting. Just going to see."

"I thought you were the keynote."

He looked over at her and pressed his palm against her thigh over the gearshift. "Oh, Janey," he said. "Lord."

It dawned on her coolly and she gunned the accelerator without meaning to.

"What an asshole you must think me," he said.

"She doesn't know you're coming?"

He shrugged, sheepish. "Thought she might like a surprise."

"That's——"

"Pathetic," he said. "I'm aware."

"You could have told me," she said. "Why didn't you—I mean, I could come in with—I haven't seen her since——" She coughed, a bleating sound.

"You're a lovely hostess."

"Now you're being kind of an asshole." She pulled over a block from the glassy expanse of the college's library and shifted to face him.

"Thanks for the ride, Janey."

She got out of the driver's seat and let him come around and kiss her neck, the base by the bones where she could feel her own pulse, and she wished him well and smoothed his hair and told him that the guest room would always be there in case of emergencies, not that she was hoping for them.

And he laughed at that, and he walked away, and she watched him with a sickly melancholy until his reflection disappeared behind the automatic doors.

• • •

They throw her a going-away dinner, but it's tepid, no Motown, conservative pours of Bordeaux, the boys being moody and childish and Charlie drinking whiskey to their wine like it's water and Clara not quite meeting her eyes. It feels like Thanksgiving at her mother's house, clinky and stilted and strained. She rises at one point and finds herself deep-breathing in the bathroom, staving off tears. She slips one of Clara's shea butter seashell soaps into her pocket before she rejoins the party.

"Janey's abandoning us for more illustrious things," Charlie says.

"It was bound to happen," Clara says, still not looking at her.

"I'll miss you guys," she says, and Gus is the only one who echoes the sentiment.

After dinner, there is no proffering of aperitifs or chocolate mousse on the terrace.

"I've got an early morning tomorrow, I'm afraid," Clara says. She pauses to write something in dry-erase marker on her big color-coded wall calendar, and it feels to Jane like an affectation. Clara turns back to face her. "But I'm happy to give you a ride."

"Oh, I——"

"For Christ's sake, sweetheart," Charlie says from the doorway. "I'll take her."

"Don't," Clara says softly, not looking at either of them. She puts a stack of plates in the sink and the clatter echoes across the countertops. "Boys?" Her voice has lifted in pitch and verve; Gus appears behind Charlie and Léo a few paces after that. "Say good-bye to Jane," Clara says. "Wish her luck."

Gus hugs Jane fiercely around the legs and she squats to kiss him on his head, feeling weirdly disembodied, feeling self-conscious kissing him while his mother is watching.

"Behave yourself, Gustave?" she says, and he nuzzles briefly against her.

Léo comes to her then too, offering a bony hand and a charmingly bowed head.

"You," she says gravely, "should feel free to e-mail me anytime."

And then he hugs her too, and it brings tears to her eyes, and she's just standing there, not-quite-crying in their big lived-in kitchen.

Charlie clears his throat. "Bedtime, soldiers," he says, and Jane doesn't have to turn to know that Clara is rolling her eyes at the unnecessarily masculine reference. Then, to Clara: "I said I'll take her."

"Your coat's in the foyer, Jane," Clara says temperately, and Jane knows this is her cue. Once she leaves the kitchen she won't see Charlie again, not until he shows up on her doorstep in Michigan 11 years later.

She stops before him and bows weirdly. "Bye," she says.

Charlie takes her in for just a second—she can feel the lightning-quick absorption of her being into his consciousness—and then he bows back at her, even more weirdly, dipping at the waist, kissing his tented palms and blowing in her direction.

"Godspeed, Janey," he says.

Clara is quiet over by the sink. Jane ducks out before she can take stock of what has happened. In the car, Clara remains quiet, and the air is quiet, and Clara's car is quiet as it rolls along Dempster Street. Jane is opening her mouth to speak when Clara interrupts.

"I'm dropping you off at the train," she says. "Is that all right?"

There's the weird ache in Jane's throat that has to be ignored. The jasmine smell inside the car. The too-long stoplight at Chicago and Main.

"Of course," she replies, mouth full of something, a cottony faraway ache.

Clara pulls up to the South Boulevard stop, dutifully flicking on her flashers. "Well," she says, brisk, courteous, efficient. The mother-voice. She is wearing one of Charlie's blue poplin button-downs and slim cropped pants; Jane has half a mind to ask her where she acquired her tasteful snakeskin flats, her unbending self-possession. "Go forth, I suppose."

"Clara," Jane says, but her throat stops her, a nauseated surging.

"You don't wear your headphones on the train, do you?"

Jane shakes her head.

"You've got your wits about you?"

"Uh-huh." She feels as though she might throw up.

There's a pause, something heavy and sad, white noise of the radio, 97.1, the Stones, *success success success success.*

"Thank you," Clara says, "for helping take care of them."

• • •

She was conspicuous, trundling. If the lecture was being given in a large space, she reasoned, she would stay, skulk near the back, pass it off as professional development. But the room in which Clara was to speak, she found, was small, maybe 30 chairs, and the ficus near the door not tall enough for her to hide behind. She turned to go, but stopped when she saw them at the end of the hall, Charlie and Clara Cross, mid-embrace, her hands on his shoulders, a big smile.

Clara looked even more formidable than she remembered, stately, now, in a wrap dress and conservative heels, that same chignon. But her ease with Charlie was the same, her hand against his cheek, her straightening of his collar, the slight leftward tilt of her head. And Jane felt that familiar ache, nervy and uterine. In Berlin, missing them, she'd begun to think of the ache as a kind of shock therapy. The conjured feel of Charlie's hands: *zap.* The warm benevolence of Clara's attention: *zap.* The awareness that she existed outside of them both, that she always would, that there was no way for her to win: *zap zap zap.*

When she looked up again, Charlie and Clara were gone. She slipped out the back way, burping up something that felt like asphalt in her throat.

• • •

"The Lost Weekend," she calls it for a couple of weeks after Charlie leaves. But Greg stops smiling at the reference after she's made it four times, so she stops making it, and they make do, wait for their universe to right itself, wait for the baby to be born, wait for the subtle rosemary of Charlie's Eau Sauvage to filter its last musky dregs through their window screens. She cannot bring herself to wash the guest room sheets until six weeks later.

They don't ever talk about it, about the fact that after Charlie leaves she and Greg don't have sex again until five months after Simone is born. She goes down on him on selected weekend evenings and satisfies herself with two-fingered friction in the bathtub on nights she says she needs alone time; she passes it off first as physical discomfort and then as hormonal rigmarole and when the baby shows up at first they're both too tired to notice. When she finally does cede to his advances, she weeps afterward, and Greg holds her tightly in his arms and apologizes, which makes her weep even harder.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he says. "You know how much I love you, don't you?"

"No," she says. Then: "Yes."

Four years later she travels to Baltimore for three days. Greg offers her the weekend away as a half-assed birthday present, *Sure, go ahead to the Round-Table Consortium of Franco-Prussian Agoraphobic Bibliophiles or whatever; I'll hold down the fort here.* He drives her to the airport and she ducks into the backseat to kiss Simone. She mothers their daughter with a haphazard mix of warmth and remove. Simone, in spite of this, seems to be turning into a lovely person. Jane credits Greg for the victory.

Greg retrieves her suitcase from the trunk and pulls her against him for a second. "Behave yourself," he says.

"Ditto," she says.

At the conference, on the first evening, Clara will regard Jane from across a crowded banquet hall, the cool dim recognition with which you might acknowledge a fellow commuter. Jane will return to her hotel room and stare at her bland face in the mirror over the desk and ponder the accumulation of years and whether childbearing has really so dramatically altered her.

"I love you," Greg says in the Grand Rapids departures lane. He does his furtive visual sweep of her face, looking for the fault lines.

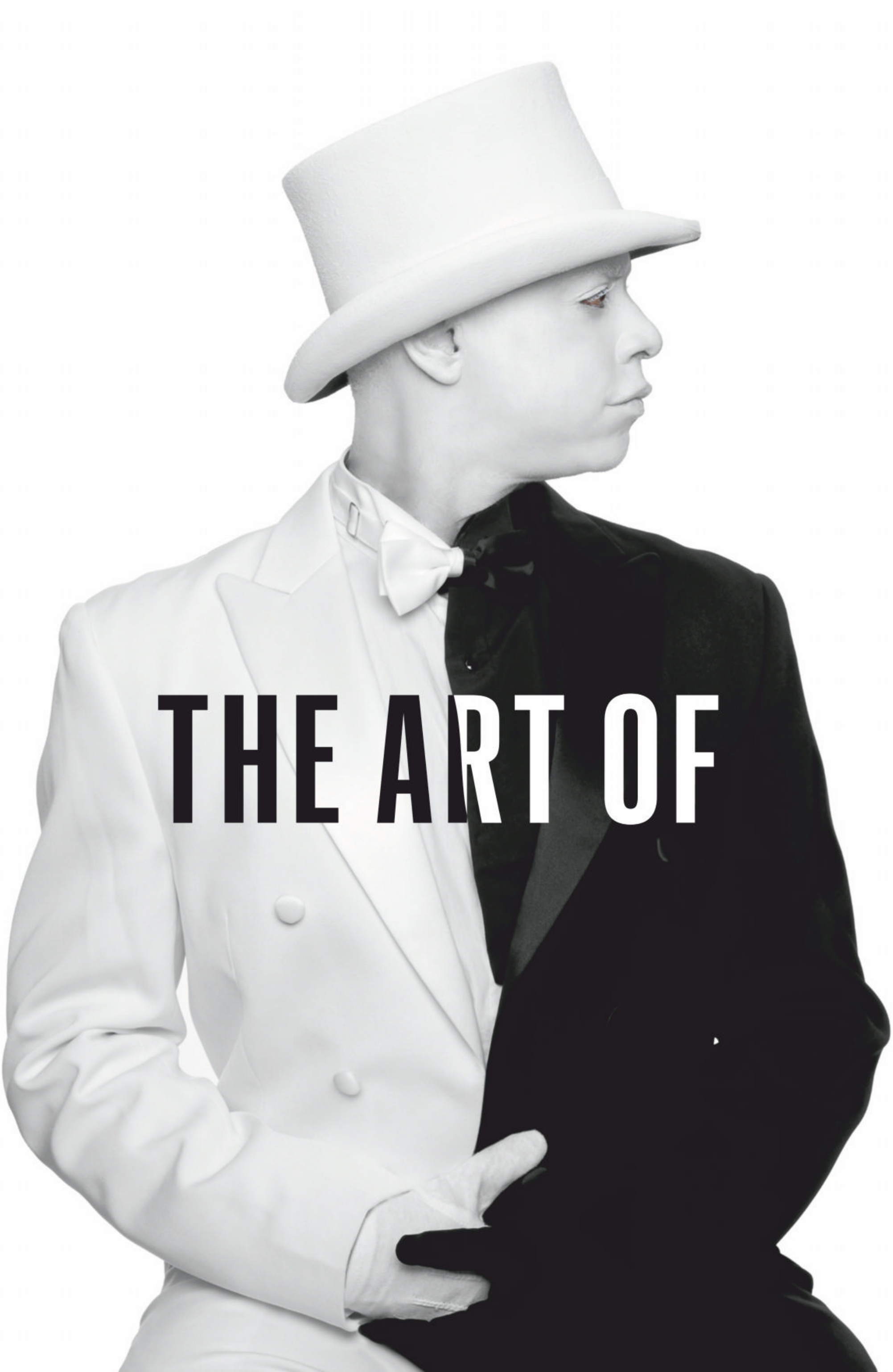
"I love you back."

She doesn't ever tell Greg about the night in the yard, the night when he was dead to the world, feverish and breathing phlegmily alone in their bed. She doesn't ever tell him that she lowered herself onto the grass beside Charlie and that at first it was just kind of sweet and sad, people sitting on the bus, knees touching and her arm around his warm shoulders. She will never divulge what happened next, the way he lowered her gently, gradually, onto her back, and fitted his body alongside hers; how his breath in her ear as he asked "Are you sure this is okay?" would have been enough on its own but how she nodded, reaching back to stroke his temple, and how he lifted her dress and lowered her underpants so that she'd barely had to move. How having him inside her was not specifically physiologically pleasant, given everything, but how the sounds he made—low, familiar, distinctly mournful—changed the tenor, shifted the balance in the air, made her arch her spine and reach helplessly for the backs of his thighs. How afterward, when she was crying, he began to rub little circles around her temples with the pads of his fingers. How she recognized the gesture—a remedy for headaches or fatigue—as belonging to Clara.

She doesn't ever tell him about that night in the yard, but she'll always suspect that he knows, and they'll go on like that, and everything's fine.



"Baby, it's <u>really</u> cold outside."


THE ART OF


ATTENTION

From injecting a sharecropper into a college kickoff to turning the Nike swoosh on its head, Hank Willis Thomas uses staples of America's ethos to comment on its inequities

BY **HENRI NEUENDORF**

Hank Willis Thomas is traveling.

This time he's in Oregon to install the first major retrospective of his work, at the Portland Art Museum. On view through January 12, 2020, the exhibit will travel to Arkansas in February and Cincinnati in July. It's a major achievement for the 43-year-old artist, a career milestone he has worked up to ever since earning his MFA from California College of the Arts in 2004. Throughout his career, Thomas has developed a reputation as one of America's most versatile and outspoken artists, using photography, sculpture, video and collaborative public art projects to raise awareness about social justice and civil rights.

That range might stem, in part, from what Thomas calls "some form of ADHD."

"When I look at my survey show, it's like, Oh wow, that's definitely a broad spectrum of work," he says. "I've always hoped that people can see the connections."

A black artist who draws extensively on advertising, nostalgia and other outgrowths of pop culture, Thomas keeps his Brooklyn studio lined with shelves of meticulously organized boxes packed with back issues of iconic black-culture magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet,* as well as retro campaign buttons and other source material. His early photographic work suggests that the collective consciousness of any society is reflected in its advertising. The poignant 2003 series *Branded,* for example, features photographs of black men marked with the Nike swoosh logo to comment on the relationships among advertising, race and consumerism.

Thomas has also explored popular entertainment, using the spectacle of professional sports as a metaphor for racism, corruption and violence. *The Cotton Bowl,* from his 2011 photo series *Strange Fruit,* juxtaposes images of a sharecropper and a black football player. The pairing serves to expose the similarities between African slaves, whose unpaid labor made generations of white Americans wealthy, and the descendants of slaves, whose unpaid work on college football teams enriches the mostly white executives of the billion-dollar sports-entertainment industry.

His sculptural pieces are no less politically charged. *We the People,* from 2015, uses patterned tapestries woven from decommissioned prison uniforms as a thinly veiled criticism of a criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates minorities and people of color. His 2014 sculpture *Raise Up,* which features cast-bronze figures reaching for the sky, was created in response to the killing of unarmed black men at the hands of police and is now a permanent part of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. (The Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim and, internationally, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia have also acquired his work.)

Speaking on the phone ahead of the Portland exhibit's opening, Thomas explains that he felt compelled to be an artist, and it's easy to see why. His mother, Deborah Willis, is a renowned photographer, a MacArthur "genius" grant recipient, a Guggenheim Fellow and current professor and chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. "I can only imagine that the conversations around the dinner table must have been really interesting," says Jack Shainman, Thomas's New York dealer. "I think Hank is much further along in terms of evolution and race than a lot of us, just because he grew up in a household that was always discussing that."

Influenced by his mother's exploration of truth and reality, the artist's early work, such as his 1997 photo series *A Thousand Words...,* focuses on how the framing of images can influence context and how their meaning changes depending on what's included or left out of the frame.

A terrifying crime proved to be a turning point in Thomas's life and career. The artist's cousin, Songha Willis, was murdered during a violent robbery in Philadelphia in February 2000. In the aftermath, Thomas's resolve crystallized. "When my cousin was murdered, I felt I needed to make art that could change the world in a more intentional way," he says.

The killing inspired Thomas to focus his energy on addressing social issues. At the same time, a rapidly changing





Opening pages: *Crossroads,* 2012, digital c-print and plexi with Lumisty film, in collaboration with Sanford Biggers. **Right:** *Raise Up,* 2014, bronze. **Below:** *The Cotton Bowl,* 2011, digital c-print.

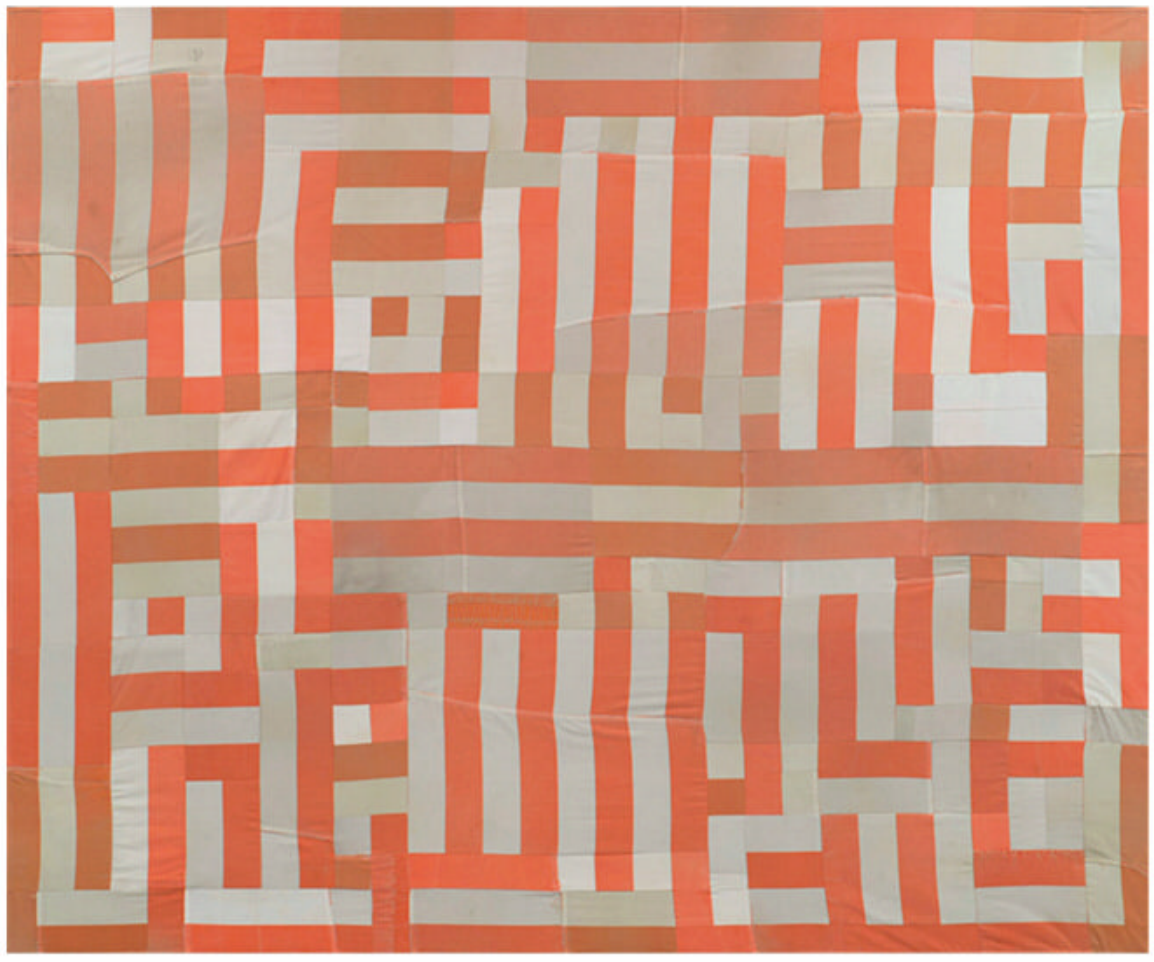
technological landscape encouraged the trained photographer to broaden his perspective. "Most of the technical things I learned, like processing film and printing, became irrelevant," he says. "All I was left with was a way of looking at and critiquing images, so a lot of my work moved away from taking the perfect picture and toward reconsidering and reframing historical images. It has kind of taken me from photography to painting to video to sculpture to social practice."

The importance of Thomas's work, according to Julia Dolan, co-curator of the Portland show, lies in the way he excavates the past to make sense of the present. "The way he addresses the founding issues of this country is so critical to the dialogue we're having on a national scale today," she says. "We are often surprised by how his work dealing with race and bias becomes more and more relevant. He really thinks about structures in society that hold folks down, hold folks back and privilege some over others."

At a time when activism and civic engagement can be fashionable and superficial, Thomas has proven himself a uniquely active participant in the civic life within and beyond his own community. "I realized there are a lot of noncreative people shaping our reality and designing policies and laws that aren't creative," Thomas says. "And there are a lot of creative people who have abdicated their responsibility in shaping the narratives that our culture is founded on."

In 2018, For Freedoms, a super PAC Thomas founded in 2016 with his friend and collaborator Eric Gottesman, worked with





Left: *We the People,* 2015, quilt made out of decommissioned prison uniforms. **Opposite page:** *Your Skin Has the Power to Protect You,* 2008, LightJet print.

more than 100 artists—including JR, Marilyn Minter, Rashid Johnson, Tania Bruguera and Theaster Gates—to take over nearly 200 billboards across all 50 states, as well as D.C. and Puerto Rico. Artists were asked to pick an issue they cared about and make a statement that could help viewers see the world in a new light.

"Working with artists is like herding feral cats, and I say that as an artist myself," Gottesman jokes. "It was ambitious, exciting and on a scale nobody has ever really done before."

Thomas also serves on the New York City Public Design Commission, an 11-member panel of experts appointed by the mayor, which reviews permanent architecture, landscape architecture and art proposals for city-owned property. According to the *New York Post,* Thomas was a vocal advocate for replacing a number of Central Park public monuments of men with those of women. "These decisions that have shaped our lives have been made by urban planners and policy makers for centuries," he says. "Who is important? Who deserves to be seen, and who doesn't?"

The same questions are being raised by art institutions and a fine art industry that has excluded minorities and women for decades. This is starting to change. But like most change in the rigidly conservative art world, it's happening slowly.

A 2018 study conducted by Artnet News and the art blog In Other Words found that just 2.3 percent of all artwork acquired (either by purchase or through donation) by 30 U.S. museums from 2008 to 2018 has been by African Americans, and that African American artists make up a mere 1.2 percent of global auction sales. These startling figures illustrate the critical role artists such as Thomas play in increasing the visibility of black artists—within both the American institutional landscape and the international marketplace for contemporary art.

Thomas's personal stance toward equality in the art world is not quite what his politically charged work suggests. "There are always people who are excluded and exploited," he acknowledges, "and we all need to be wide awake to our participation in ignoring important things and people." However, he continues, "the more interesting stuff always happens outside the mainstream conversation, and so I don't think we should all be rushing so quickly to be accepted by the status quo. I do recognize that I am now part of the status quo, and I have a responsibility to improve it. That includes working hard toward greater inclusion and knowing that the work is never over."

For all his enthusiasm for civic engagement and civil rights—both in his work and in his activism—Thomas's chosen mediums and conceptually rigorous approach translate into market prices that fall below those of many other artists of his generation.





Left: *I Am. Amen.,* 2009, Liquitex on canvas. **Opposite page:** *Branded Head,* 2003, Lambda photograph.

In the art world, an artist's auction record can be a reliable barometer of the market's demand for their work. Artists who work across fewer mediums and approach their craft from a more decorative or colorful perspective—such as Johnson, Kehinde Wiley (who painted Barack Obama's official portrait) and Mickalene Thomas—have all achieved higher auction prices than Thomas. The highest-ever price paid for a work by Wiley is $300,000; Mickalene Thomas's top price is nearly $700,000; and Johnson's high mark stands at $1.16 million. In contrast, Thomas's auction record is $75,000.

Shainman points out that sales aren't necessarily an indicator of quality or importance, explaining that photographs and editions, which account for the majority of Thomas's work, tend to be priced lower than original paintings.

"In order for an artist to be successful today, the work has to be about ideas and also be interesting aesthetically," Shainman says. "Hank is able to balance these two things and merge them to make pieces that don't look like anybody else's—which is really important today too, since there have been so many artists who have come before us."

Grammy-winning hip-hop producer Swizz Beatz has been a collector of Thomas's work since 2018. "I first saw his amazing work online, and it was so epic," he says via e-mail. "At first sight, what grabbed me was the bold and artistic expressions in his work. Hank is a leader, a teacher, and super forward-thinking when it comes to culture and politics. I've seen Hank's growth; he's made many new big steps, and I'm super proud of him in so many ways. I feel that Hank is reflective of the future of the arts now."

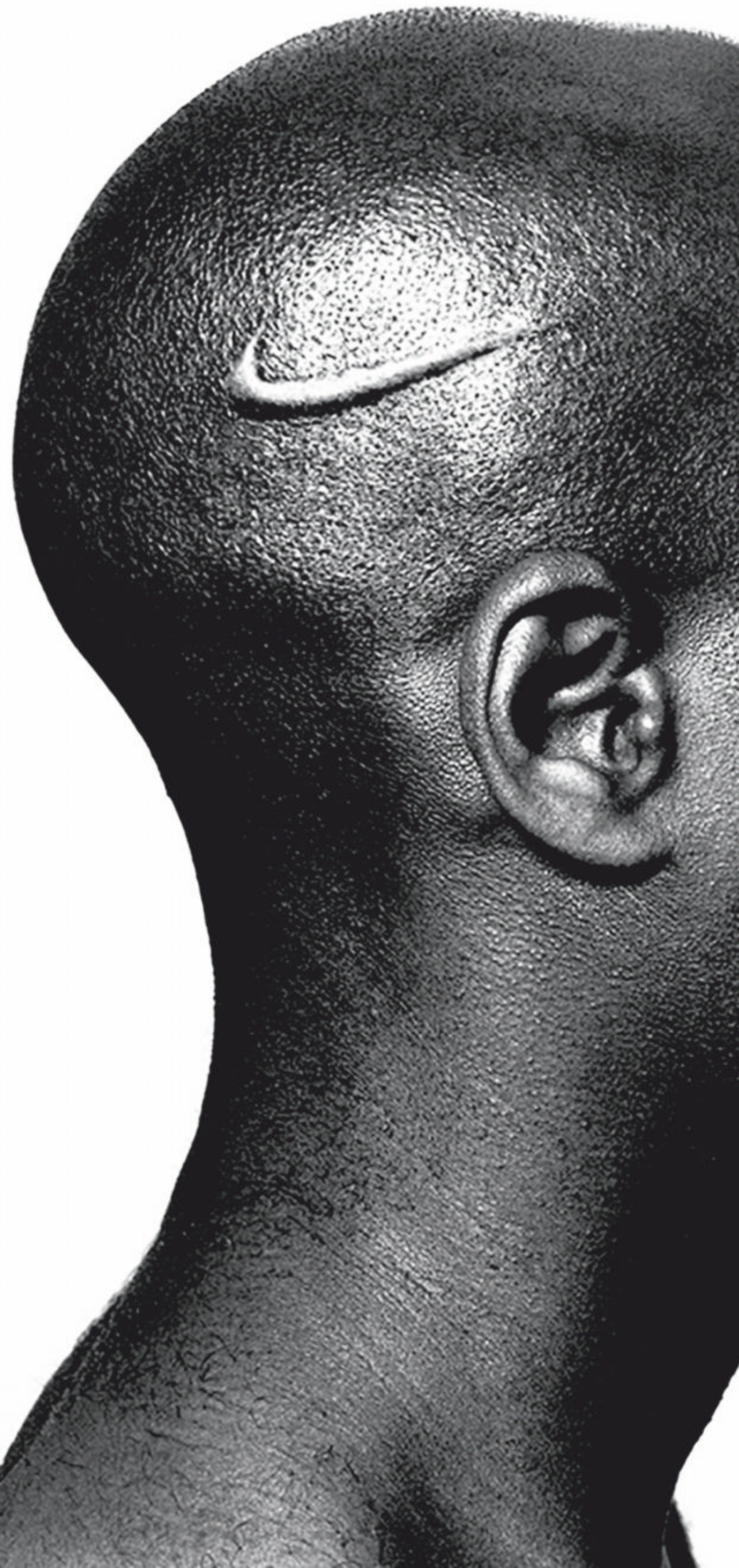
Thomas's busy upcoming year is likely to give his market a boost. Asked about the demand for his work, he's ambivalent, explaining that prices "are not an actual tangible indicator of value per se." But, he admits, "we've been trained to value things that are more expensive, so when you make something people think is expensive, it automatically becomes historic and important."

Much of Thomas's work puts its metaphorical finger directly into the wound and urges its viewers to engage in difficult conversations; presumably this particular brand of candor doesn't sit well with many art collectors, who are disproportionately white. But the artist has no plans to make his work more palatable for the market. "I only know how to be me," he says. "I don't separate my art from my life."

While Thomas's outspokenness is a key part of his role as an artist, it has gotten him into trouble too. In September 2018, South African photographer Graeme Williams accused the American artist of copying his photograph of black schoolchildren and white police officers, an image that became a symbol of the end of apartheid. Speaking to *The Guardian,* Williams insisted that the changes in Thomas's whited-out version were "minimal" and accused the artist of "theft, plagiarism [and] appropriation."

Responding to the accusations, Thomas asks, "How do we in the age of mass and digital reproduction talk about history and visual culture?" He adds, "In books you can put quotation marks around words, attribute it to someone, and it's okay." In

At a **time** when civic engagement can be **fashionable,** Thomas has proven himself a **uniquely** active participant.



visual art, he argues, notions of authorship and the lines between appropriation and plagiarism are much harder to trace.

Perhaps this blurring of authorial boundaries is related to his willingness to collaborate. Thomas readily admits that much of his creative process is brainstormed, delegated and outsourced to historians, fabricators, writers, graphic designers and illustrators. “I think of myself more like an art director than a traditional fine artist,” he says. This is more common than it sounds. Like Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and many of the masters who came before them, contemporary artists including Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons and Yayoi Kusama maintain large workshops and studios in order to meet market demand.

Dolan says Thomas’s collaborative instinct stems from his essential human curiosity. “He’s very interested in what other people think,” she says. “He really wants to hear others and understand how they see the world to explore how his perceptions might be helped, changed or enhanced by listening and collaborating.”

Thomas’s inquisitive nature and dizzying range ultimately serve a dual purpose perfectly summed up by Gottesman, his friend for almost 20 years.

“I think he’s aware of the power of attention. That’s really what his work is all about,” Gottesman says. “It’s about criticizing how attention is garnered by larger forces in society. So on a personal level he’s always trying to bring other people in and bring new voices into the conversation.”


LOVE
OVER
RULES





Opposite page: *Love Over Rules,* 2018, neon. **Above:** *Jungle Fever,* 1991–2007, LightJet print, original photographer unknown. **Right:** *Guernica,* 2016, mixed media with sports jerseys.

force *of* nature

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LOU ESCOBAR**



With a new album forthcoming, hip-hop powerhouse Princess Nokia explains why living in multiple dimensions is paramount to her existence on Earth

BY **JHONI JACKSON**

"Every day I feel different. Every day it's either masc or femme or in between. Every day is goth or bohemian," Princess Nokia tells me. "When I wake up and feel an energy, I coexist with it."

The performer, born Destiny Frasqueri, is fluid in more ways than one. "I'm a gender-nonconforming androgynous person," she says. "But some people are like, 'What happened to your tomboy phase?' "

That question is a reference to Frasqueri's breakthrough 2017 single "Tomboy," off the album *1992 Deluxe*. The song's music video sees her on a basketball court in an oversized T-shirt pulled over a sweatshirt. She later raps about her "little titties" and "phat belly." Those who inquire about her lost era of tomboyishness seem not to realize that Frasqueri's presentation will never be absolute and thus defies tidy categorization.

In a culture that encourages us to divide—by religion, economics, race, age, sexuality, the list never ends—the multihyphenate Princess Nokia persona sets out to represent the complexity of women, artists and human beings. She's a lover and a fighter. She's a rapper and a singer. She's masculine and feminine. She's a pragmatist and a dreamer. And no matter the haters, Frasqueri is unstoppable.

"It's so much easier to understand artistic men," Frasqueri remarks. "But women—especially brown women—we think they have psychological issues."

It's a given that career-minded women have to work harder to earn respect and dollars. In hip-hop specifically, female up-and-comers often have a male sponsor. Lil Wayne ushered Nicki Minaj into the spotlight; Timbaland collaborated with Missy Elliott. Even with a co-signer, the unofficial rule is that urban female entertainers subject themselves to sexualization. Today, rising rappers such as Megan Thee Stallion, City Girls and Saweetie seemingly have to perform as vixen archetypes as well as perform flawless bars.

The number of female rappers signed to major labels has dropped precipitously since the late-1980s and early-1990s heyday, when more than 40 women had major deals at one time. In 2010, three did. To this day, only six female rappers have reached number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Those granted stardom are a reflection of mainstream values and ideals, which are often sexist and racist. But celebrity also offers a means of challenging those norms. By acknowledging these truths and refusing to be anybody but her authentic self, Frasqueri is causing a disruption.

"I love being proud of how studly I am, how boyish and how manly I can appear. I love being androgynous," she says. "I feel beautiful like that. It's just another beautiful side of me."

Beyond "Tomboy," Frasqueri's catalogue feels boundless. On 2014's *Metallic Butterfly,* she explores trip-hop mixed with sci-fi-inspired pop and Afro-Latin beats. The first track, "Dimensia," announces on top of reverberations, "Welcome to *Metallic Butterfly,* where you are now free / On this planet, you are now released of all plague, hate and disease." She suggests young girls seek out respect and describes herself as an anomaly, sliding back and forth between spoken word and chants over bubbly beats. *1992 Deluxe* stars a darker, swaggier Frasqueri who doesn't ask for respect; she demands it. Her power stance widens on "G.O.A.T," on which she rattles with the profound confidence born of being a "weird girl."

Just when the industry assumed Frasqueri would stay on the path of hard anthems, she abandoned bravado on the 2018 mixtape *A Girl Cried Red,* a nod to the post-hardcore-punk-rock subgenre of emo. There, she trades rapping for singing of loneliness and depression.

Her forthcoming album promises to be a layered and stunning work. Untitled at press time, the project will be her first to benefit from having new legal and management representation.

"Sugar Honey Iced Tea (S.H.I.T.)," her newest single, presents a version of



Frasqueri that honors her previous musical tropes by weaving them together. In the track's video, a parody of beauty pageants, jazz horns and gospel vocals erupt as the defiant rapper gazes at her reflection in a dressing-room mirror; a line of competitors zhuzh in the background.

"These bitches don't like me / These bitches wanna fight me / And doing shit just to spite me." When she wins the pageant, she floats down the runway, resembling the Virgin Mary.

"I know I hold my principles and my virtues so deeply that you will never take me from that peacefulness," she says of the video's meaning. "And you can never take that crown away from me."

A long white lace veil and a large crown indeed adorn Frasqueri in that video, and the song's lyrics also revisit tales from her less-than-perfect past. "I'm on the train throwing soup," she raps, referencing her reaction to a man on New York's L train who had been slinging racial slurs at a group of teenage boys. Frasqueri's soup-throwing made headlines two years ago, and it's a moment she doesn't want us to forget. "I love to throw hands on racists, bigots and scum," she raps. Frasqueri ends the video by passing the crown to a young girl.

"That's who I am in real life. I'm hood, and I'm very involved at the same time, and that gives me a lot of wisdom," she says. "It allows me to love myself and love my people. It allows me to see how conditioned people around me are and not to blame them for their pain. It also makes me strong enough to know that I am not passive, and if it really comes to that, we can take it there. I need to fight for the things that matter."

Frasqueri identifies as a *santera,* a priestess of Santería, her family's practice. Santería is a religion that took root among Afro-Cuban slaves in the Caribbean. Many of its practices are kept secret to avoid persecution, but the faction is known to worship the gods of West Africa, known as orishas, who are seen as nature personified.

Perhaps her worship of Mother Nature is why Frasqueri wanted to embody the four elements in PLAYBOY, complete with snakes and doves. "Snakes are earth, and they ground you and make you feel pure and whole," she says. "I love my body. I know that I embody the four elements in a very profound way, as every woman does, and as every person does."

Frasqueri, born in New York, grew up without the guidance of her own mother. Her childhood had been marked by a loving family with a fondness for hip-hop and a beloved goth babysitter who introduced her to heavy metal. Then, when Frasqueri was still a child, her mother died of AIDS. Shortly after, her grandmother died. Frasqueri was then placed in foster care; at the age of 16 she ran away from an abusive foster home in East Harlem.

Frasqueri found comfort in New York's queer community. The maestros of the city's LGBTQ nightlife taught her how to entertain while standing up for her fellow outsiders. Today she continues to empathize with the often forgotten, including the 3.4 million people in Puerto Rico struggling to rebuild after Hurricane Maria tore through the island in September 2017. That month, Frasqueri set up an independent disaster-relief fund to aid the territory her family is from. In June 2018, she canceled a performance in Mexico City to focus on relief work. She founded Hood 2 La Gente, a campaign to support communities affected by the natural disaster. Last February, she headlined a show at the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras campus. The event was unlike any of her previous productions: Organized by a university queer-activism collective, it opened with an act that spotlighted performers from the city's alternative LGBTQ scene.

"It was something very powerful for me," she says. The show was free; no bouncers surrounded the small stage, and the audience was treated to an impromptu meet-and-greet.

"There's so much racism, homophobia, transphobia and corruption," she says of Puerto Rico, which, as of 2018, has a poverty rate of almost 45 percent. "It was nice that everyone was in a place where



“I’ve been **called** hurtful things based on who **I am,** on my **spiritualism,** on my astrological planning chart, on my **duality.**”





they didn't have to fear, because they were surrounded by people just like them."

The people in that venue, on that warm evening in the island's capital, likely understood Frasqueri better than many of her peers. In an industry run on the iPhones of agents, managers and publicists, she chooses to work with a small crew and without a record deal.

"I always have to fight for my seat at the table, because no one is going to give it to me—and I've accepted that," she says.

Frasqueri has formidable engagement on social media, with more than 1 million monthly listeners on Spotify and almost 40 million views on YouTube to date. The "Sugar Honey Iced Tea" music video broke 1 million views within a month of its release. At the same time, Frasqueri points out that people have deemed her "crazy," "fake" and a "fraud" because, according to her, she makes people uncomfortable.

"I find that really unfortunate, because I make it so easy. I've made it very easy for people to understand me," she says.

Frasqueri could be perceived as a woman of contradictions: She loves empowering others, but she'll fight if she needs to. She wants to maintain artistic freedom, but she signed a distribution deal. "Gemini," another track from her new album, may be the most concise suggestion of who Princess Nokia is: "Two heads, one eye," she raps, accompanied by swirling instruments.

"In my new album I'm trying to embody how special my sign makes me and how unique it's made my career," she says. "I've been called lots of hurtful things based on who I am, on my spiritualism, on my astrological planning chart, on my duality."

Despite the heartache that comes with feeling misunderstood, Frasqueri's connections to spirituality, nature and the world keep her going. "I make great art, and I make art that inspires others. That's all that matters. The other stuff that comes after, that's up to God, you know?" she says. "When the world needs reminding of my greatness, I'm there to remind them, but I'm not here to whine. I continue."



PORTRAITS

for the PEOPLE

An eminent critic and a boundary-breaking artist convene for a rare tête-à-tête—and demonstrate that sometimes the most powerful insiders enter from the outside

INTERVIEW BY **JERRY SALTZ**

ART BY **JR**

"Ready...one, two, three!"

It's 4:30 P.M. on a Thursday, and JR and Jerry Saltz are jumping. The French artist and the Pulitzer Prize–winning art critic bend their knees and bounce, striking a running-man pose mid-flight. Behind them is *The Chronicles of New York City,* a 32-foot-wide, 21-foot-tall black-and-white mural featuring 1,128 New Yorkers of every age and ilk, from movie stars to cops. JR spent a year photographing and interviewing each of them before digitally collaging their portraits into a single, sweeping New York cityscape.

Click-click-click-click. A camera flashes, and their landing thuds echo through the Brooklyn Museum's Great Hall.

"Exactly," JR nods approvingly.

"Wait—I have moobs!" exclaims Saltz, clutching his chest in mock distress. Laughter erupts from the smattering of people on Playboy's makeshift set.

Today marks the first time the two men have met, but they have much in common. In addition to being New Yorkers, both are self-taught outsiders—Saltz was a truck driver until the age of 41, and JR usually prefers open spaces to white walls—who have become powerful insiders by insisting that art is for everyone, not just the people who flock to museums and auctions.

We're here for a private preview of JR: Chronicles, the artist's first major museum show in North America and his largest exhibit to date. Now 36 years old, he is best known for wheat-pasting colossal black-and-white portraits onto buildings, bridges and the surfaces of geopolitical hot spots around the world. From favela matriarchs in Brazil to a toddler peering over a U.S.-Mexico border fence, his subjects are usually people whose portraits you wouldn't expect to see exhibited publicly, let alone at skyscraper scale.

The artist goes exclusively by his initials and usually dons shades and a fedora in public—an effort at semi-anonymity that ensures smooth passage across international borders. He also reasons that disclosing his identity would pull focus away from his subjects and the conversations their portraits can spark. (Saltz calls him an "inclusive version of Banksy.")

The year 2019 was a big one for JR. In addition to unveiling the largest show of his career, the self-described "wallpaper artist" photographed Madonna for the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* and, in an astounding feat of tromp l'oeil, submerged the Louvre's glass pyramid in a moat of paper and glue. JR: Chronicles, a 20,000-square-foot survey on view in Brooklyn until May 2020, spans 15 years of his career and marks the first time the museum has dedicated its Great Hall to a single artist. The aforementioned *Chronicles of New York City,* which includes an audio recording of each subject, is arguably JR's most ambitious project yet. (You can hear each interview via the QR code that appears below.) Part love letter to New York and part Diego Rivera mural for the digital age, the artist calls his creation "a mirror of the city."

However you characterize it, the piece brings to life one of the most resonant qualities of JR's work: a multilayered expression of democratized art.

The day after a star-studded reception, during which the artist spent more time catching up with a local butcher than he did side-hugging Jake Gyllenhaal, JR and Saltz stroll the museum, going deep on the work and their unlikely paths to the upper echelons of the art world. Read on for a sliver of that hour-plus conversation, which touches on teenage arrests, the notion of "radical vulnerability," grandmothers, Robert De Niro, the power of failure and much more.—*Elizabeth Suman*



Opening pages: *The Chronicles of New York City,* 2018–2019. **Left:** *ROL.K, métro,* Paris, France, 2002. JR started writing graffiti on walls at the age of 13; when he found a camera in the Paris Metro a few years later, he switched to covering them with portraits. **Opposite page:** *JR au Louvre et le Secret de la Grande Pyramide,* 2019. Last spring, in celebration of the Louvre Pyramid's 30th birthday, the artist, using 2,000 paper strips and 400 volunteers, made the structure appear to be rising from a quarry.



SALTZ: Last night there were thousands of people here, from every walk of life. I saw Chris Rock. I saw Jake Gyllenhaal. But then I saw hundreds of people I never see in a museum—street artists, neighborhood people—and they were taking pictures and pointing at each other. And here we are, surrounded by a gigantic mural of the people and places of New York City that you've arranged. What is going on here?

JR: Like you said, it's people. And actually, even if last night you saw some people who might be more famous than others—well, if they're in this mural, they're not bigger than anyone else. It's not a group photo; it's a group *of* photos, where no one person is more important than another. So Robert De Niro, who was there last night, he's sitting on a stoop with other people, just blending in. And every single person here decided to represent themselves the way they wanted. I didn't decide how they were going to be represented. *They* decided.

SALTZ: It's like a mural of modern life for future historians. There are spectacular Renaissance murals in Venice and Rome, where painters were painting huge crowd scenes like this. Do you think of these as gigantic frescoes of a time and a place? It's a living encyclopedia.

JR: Definitely. This is exactly the same thing, but the contemporary version of it, which is that you can listen to every single person and hear what they have to say. And those interviews are not conducted. It's not like "How do you define yourself?" It's "Here's a mike; you say whatever you want to say. One day your grandchildren will hear it. What would you want to say?"

SALTZ: As a viewer, I can read or hear those interviews. But first is the optical impact. It's almost beyond real—overwhelming, breathtaking, incomprehensible. It's almost inhuman, like an insect-eye view of the world. How was this made?

JR: Well, it's a collage, so actually it's in the line of work I've been doing, because I'm a wallpaper artist at the end.

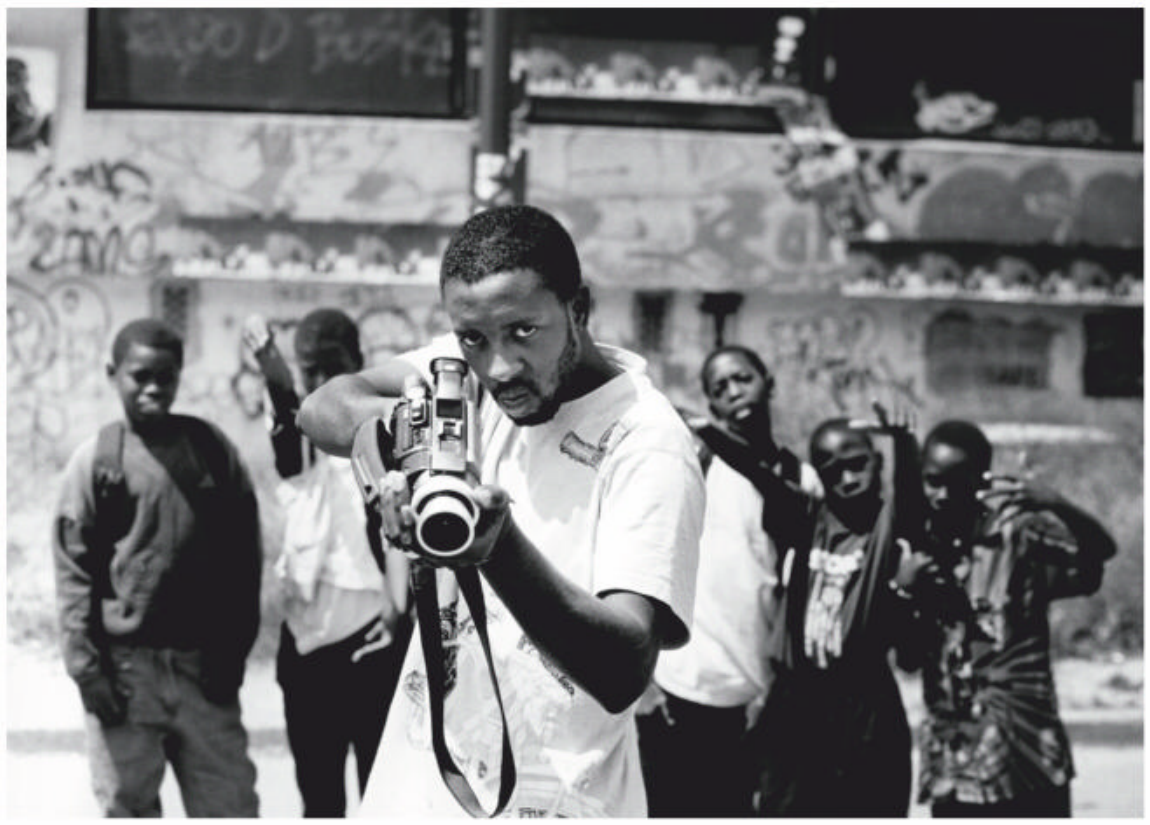
SALTZ: What's a wallpaper artist? Is that bad?

JR: No! I unroll strips on walls. People think I'm a photographer. I'm not. Photography is just part of my process. I'm an artist who uses paper as my main subject, and I paste it.

SALTZ: There are lots of mini-narratives and dramas. It's like 10,000 soap operas. There's a group of B-boys and another of firefighters. There might be a painter or a sculptor working.

JR: Yes. People just reading, people hugging in the middle of the city. It's a mirror of the city. I've lived here for almost nine


ESTINE



Above: *28 Millimètres, Portrait of a Generation, Braquage, Ladj Ly by JR, Les Bosquets Montfermeil,* 2004. JR's seminal work: a portrait of friend and filmmaker Ladj Ly wielding a video camera. The piece led to the series *Portrait of a Generation*, a response to the media's portrayal of young people from the projects. **Left:** *28 Millimètres, Face 2 Face,* 2007. For this, perhaps the largest illegal photography exhibition on record, JR (and nuns) pasted portraits of Arabs and Jews, printed on 15,000 square feet of paper, in cities across Israel and Palestine.

years. Living here I had one vision of New York. But doing this mural is an excuse to go into every borough, into every neighborhood, and tap on anyone's shoulder and say, "Who are you?"

SALTZ: Let me ask a specific question. There are about 25 people in the center sucking on long, long straws. What the fuck is going on?

JR: Well, that was kind of a metaphor for all the people drinking juice all day and all the green juice in the city.

SALTZ: Right? It's insane. So that's a comment about how people are always trying to be healthy or they're busy. Are they sucking out our brains, mixing up the medicine?

JR: Yeah, it's this mixture.

SALTZ: Again, when I look at any one person, I can't really know if he's a movie star or an accountant or a gangster.

JR: Yes. But if you click on him, you'll have his name and his story—his story however he wishes to share it.

SALTZ: And then this makes me wonder.... You're anonymous. I know you only as JR. You're wearing sunglasses and a very stylish hat.

JR: Thank you. I appreciate that.

SALTZ: And incredibly good-looking. It's a nightmare for somebody like me. And you have charisma, so that helps you with other human beings. But why anonymity? You're a cult, but only as this unknown, masked mark-maker, like Zorro or Batman.

JR: This show actually helps me explain that. In a work like this, it's no use at all.

SALTZ: They see your face?

JR: Yeah, most of the people saw my eyes, when I was in my photo truck.

SALTZ: You *have* peered over your glasses at me and then taken off your hat. Am I being seduced? What's up?

JR: Whenever there's a camera, I tend to put on the glasses and hat. The thing is, when I take them off, you would not even recognize me at the airport or in the street. You're like, "I don't know this person. Who is that?" Anonymity helped me when I did work at the Mexico border. It was possible only because I could cross the border and they would not recognize me. I can go to Turkey and to the Middle East, and each time I have to pass police control or borders, I take my hat and glasses off, and I'm just——

SALTZ: You're another person. Secret agents and assassins blend in too.

JR: Exactly.

SALTZ: But in the world of art and museums and galleries and your work, you're anonymous. Why?

JR: Well, because everything is connected. If a photo taken of us today is published without my hat and sunglasses, then when I'm at the border the next time, people will know my face. So I haven't done a photo since I was 13 years old that I don't have my sunglasses on.

SALTZ: Do you think if I knew that your name was "Jonathan Jones" and that you were from Holland that you would have trouble passing borders as a famous artist like this?

JR: Exactly. Look, when I did a project in Turkey, the city fined me. But they fined X, because they didn't have my name. I had to pay the fines through the company I rented the scaffolding from. They could never stop me when I left, but they would have if they knew my name was Jonathan Jones. Same with the border.

SALTZ: Genius. You could transport drugs, actually. In my world, the high artsy-fartsy art world, everybody has a name. It's stardom, the cult of the male star, in particular. You're that, but you're known only as JR. That's another layer of anonymity. Or is it another type of fame? Why that layer?

JR: Well, early on it started with graffiti.

SALTZ: What was your name?

JR: Face 3, but I would actually write "JR" a lot. Face 3 was really the early one.

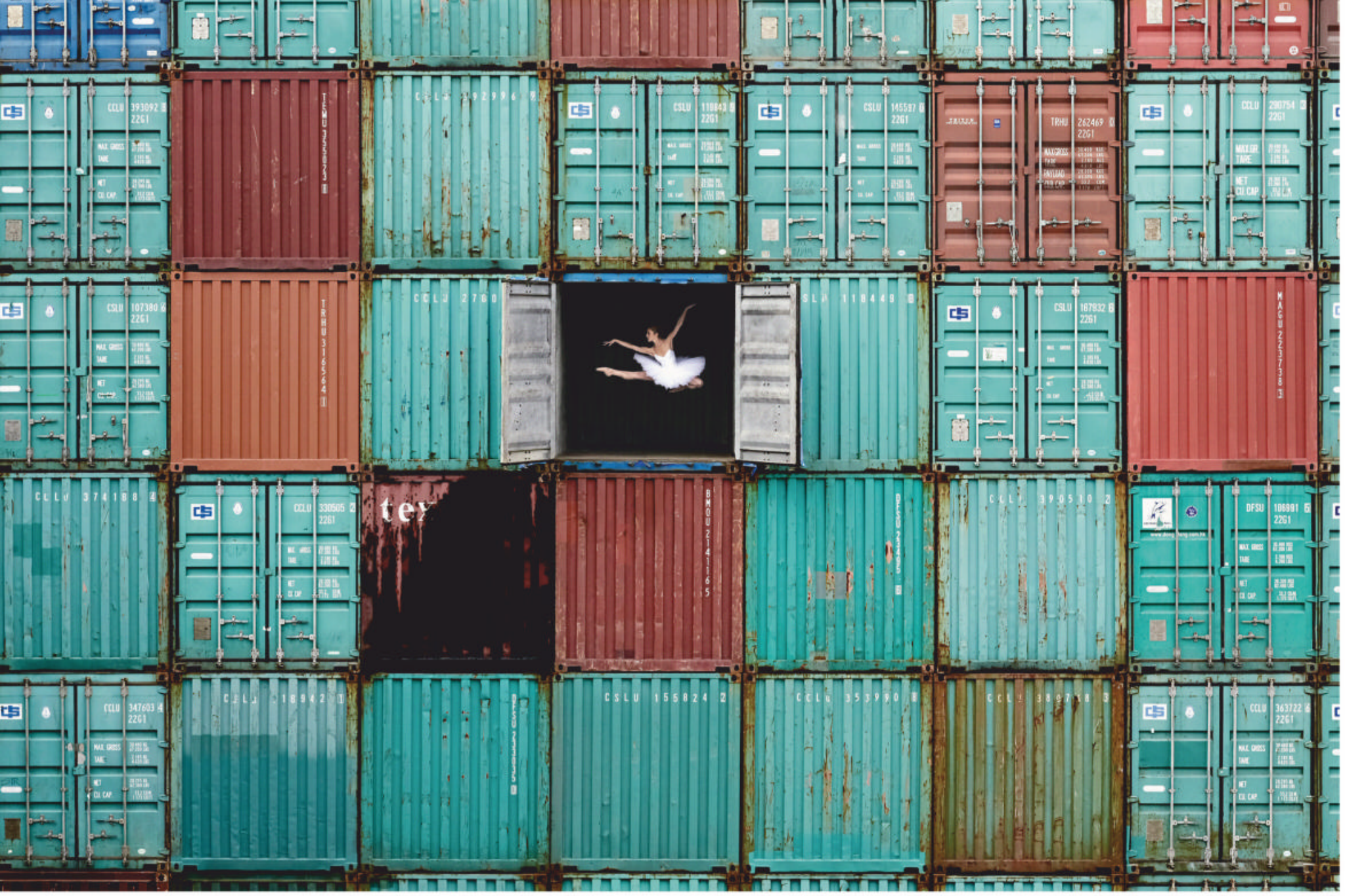
SALTZ: But that was just generic graffiti. I don't like the graffiti where they're just writing their names. The reason I don't like it is that no one breaks out of the graffiti convention. Everyone's work looks the same. Only the names are different.

JR: Exactly.

SALTZ: Then—and I don't want you to be touchy about this—I think you took a thought structure that came through Banksy, where he's very antagonistic to politics and economics, and you made that go gigantic. You took an idea of graffiti, broke the earliest, boring convention of name writing, combined it with muralists—Diego Rivera,

For me, there's no taboo subject; it's about how deep you go.

as you've talked about. And then the paper; I think the paper is key for you.
JR: Yeah. Look, I wish I could say it in those words. It's probably right. The thing is you have to go back to when I was 17. I knew nothing about Banksy or about Shepard Fairey.
SALTZ: Can you say what year it was?
JR: It was exactly 2000.
SALTZ: And was Banksy a god? No. He was just an English guy.
JR: Exactly. Doing graffiti too, actually.
SALTZ: I heard a rumor he went to an expensive art school.
JR: I have never been to art school.
SALTZ: Me neither. No art in my life.
JR: That's why I love talking with you.
SALTZ: Art was for smart people.
JR: I think that's why I came so naturally into the art world: because I didn't even know there *was* an art world.
SALTZ: I have no degrees. I was a long-distance truck driver until the age of 41.
JR: I love that.
SALTZ: You started at 13?
JR: Yes. I'm 36 now. When I was 13, I started writing my name on the wall. When I was 16, a friend of mine came to me and said, "JR, I've got to stop graffiti because I think what we're doing here is we're a victim of a society of consumers. We're writing our name every day like all those brands around us." I was like, "Are you crazy?" Then it hit me, and I'm like, "You know what? I'm actually really bad at it anyway. I don't even know how to make a colorful painting. It's all the same." Luckily for me I found a camera, but photography was a rich sport. Photography was not accessible to everybody, and that's where I think if I was born 10 years earlier, there would be none of what I've done.
SALTZ: Because then you would've had to pay for film and developing——
JR: And travel. Low-cost travel arrived exactly in my generation. The internet arrived exactly in my generation. So I didn't know Basquiat, Keith Haring.
SALTZ: You're an outsider, untrained.
JR: Completely.
SALTZ: And that's why you had to invent the entire process?
JR: To be honest, at 17, when I pasted the Champs-Élysées with my tiny photos [*Expo 2 Rue*], I thought I'd made it. I thought there was no other journey. My goal, as someone who grew up outside Paris, in the projects, was "I have to put my photos on the Champs-Élysées." And I did it!
SALTZ: People like me, creatures of the high-art world, weren't coming to your openings in the past five years. We've come only recently. What do you think of that?
JR: Well, for me it's getting more and more exciting, because, like last night, I can merge—my whole goal is to merge. Merge the worlds without high-class, low-class, famous, nonfamous. When people gather there, they realize they all have something in common. They've never met; now they're part of the same piece forever.
SALTZ: That seems like a big theme in your work. It isn't like Banksy, who says, "This is very bad." He's very pointed and harsh in his critiques of society, income inequality or whatever. You are without commentary, in a way.
JR: Who am I to comment?
SALTZ: Many of your pictures are just groupings of people. Why are they black and white?
JR: Black and white started because I wanted to differentiate myself from advertising, which I hold a big stand against. I haven't worked with any brand, any sponsor, any logo in 20 years—no Louis Vuitton, Colgate or whatever at the entrance of the museum.
SALTZ: So if I was Louis Vuitton and said, "I'd love you to make us a gigantic picture," you would say——
JR: And you bring me $20 million, I still say no.
SALTZ: You would say, "I will make it for $20 million but no insignia."
JR: Even then, I wouldn't even start a discussion.
SALTZ: How do you make money now?
JR: Most of my work doesn't make money. But one percent of it....
SALTZ: Like a lot of artists.
JR: Yeah, 99 percent doesn't make money, but the one percent makes enough to publish the rest.
SALTZ: You self-financed to get here and become this artist you are now.
JR: Exactly. I self-finance, or sometimes there's a foundation or someone.
SALTZ: How did you self-finance 10 years ago?
JR: Even with my first project in the projects outside Paris, all my friends pooled some money. Each of them gave 50 bucks, 100 bucks. So I know I don't need to have a 100-person studio in the most impressive building to be functioning. I know I can function with nothing, because I did it.
SALTZ: You have a real affinity for women, powerful women. What do you think accounts for that? I don't want to ruin your anonymity, but does this connect to your mother?
JR: Yeah. I grew up living with my grandmother but also taking care of elderly women in my building, in the projects.
SALTZ: Would I have heard of the place you grew up?
JR: It's a project a bit like the one where I took most of my photos, but another one.
SALTZ: Okay. So you were middle-class, roughly.
JR: Yeah, low middle-class.







Top: *The Ballerina Jumping in Containers,* France, 2014. Considering his penchant for jumping, JR's affinity for dance is unsurprising; in 2014, he choreographed a production for the New York City Ballet. **Above:** *Inside Out,* Times Square, 2013. In 2011, JR became the first artist to win a TED Prize. He put the purse toward the launch of this ongoing interactive project, which allows anyone anywhere to organize portrait-pastings. **Left:** *28 Millimètres, Women Are Heroes, Action in the Favela Morro da Providência,* 2008. A scene from *Women Are Heroes,* a 2008–2014 project that focuses on portraits of women living in areas of conflict.



Above: *The Gun Chronicles: A Story of America*, 2018, video mural. For this Emmy-nominated video project, a still of which appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, JR managed to get members of the NRA and Black Lives Matter not only in the same photograph but eventually in the same room. The artist has installed *Chronicles* murals in San Francisco and Clichy, France, and began work on one in Cuba in December.



Above: A portrait from *Wrinkles of the City,* Los Angeles, 2011. In 2008, JR launched this ongoing project that examines age. For this installment, JR pasted portraits of people across L.A. as a rumination on the city's focus on superficial beauty. **Right:** *Migrants, Mayra, Picnic Across the Border*, 2017. In the U.S., JR is best known for his 2017 viral project *Kikito,* a giant photograph of a Mexican toddler installed atop a California border fence. He marked the final day of the project by staging a transborder celebration featuring "the eyes of a dreamer."





SALTZ: So you have a mother. Did she approve of the JR entity when he would run around? Were you on drugs in those days?
JR: I never drank or took drugs, but I was into groups of friends fighting.
SALTZ: Did you fight?
JR: Yes, and I had a lot of trouble with the police at that age.
SALTZ: Did you carry a gun?
JR: No, but my friend did. Or knives. And I have to say, at that time my parents were really worried. One day, I remember the police called them, and they had to come pick me up in Paris because I was arrested for graffiti. My mom was like, "What did he do?" They said, "Well, he tagged on the wall." And she was like, "Oh, and you want me to come all the way to Paris because he tagged on the wall? Well, you can keep him." *Boom*. And so that day I was like, "Okay, I'll find myself a passion." Then I have a goal: My goal is to make that roof, however I get there. It's to go into that tunnel, however I do it. And then slowly I started changing from the groups of friends who were just making trouble to the groups of friends who were looking to climb the highest building or TV antenna.
SALTZ: I think your work is changing right now. I think something's going on. I know something *needs to change* so you're not just this fancy-pants big photo-mural guy with a hat and sunglasses.
JR: Well, I hope to constantly be changing.



SALTZ: You need to be changing, because otherwise, like most graffiti artists—and you're not that—they get one style and that's it. That isn't a good thing, JR. Are you boxing yourself in, becoming just another visual brand?
JR: But that's why I directed a ballet. I made a film with Agnès Varda. That's why I'm always pushing myself in areas I don't know anything about, always.
SALTZ: Right.
JR: Because I want to fail. I think there's nothing better than trying a project where there's more failure than success. I put myself in this constantly, and I think that if not, there's no point to being an artist if you're doing everything the same that people like because it works.
SALTZ: That's just product.
JR: Yeah, exactly. So I didn't choose that journey to just repeat myself.
SALTZ: Samuel Beckett said, "Try again, fail again, fail better."
JR: Exactly.
SALTZ: Well, wow, JR. This is an amazing journey you've taken. I feel lucky in a way—you don't normally do press like this. What made you say yes to PLAYBOY? You're not being paid; there's no dough here. And it's, um, PLAYBOY.
JR: You know, one thing I realized a couple of years ago when I stopped doing press is that I had so much more time. I didn't have to wake up at seven A.M. to go to a radio station. I also realized that often you don't have the space to talk. If we were talking for 10 minutes, however great you are in 10 minutes, it doesn't get to the depths of the work. So it's better that people don't know about it. When I put my work on the street, it's not even signed. It's only the people who want to find out what it is who will find out. If not, they walk every day in front of a black-and-white image not knowing what it is. So the reason I said yes to this interview is really because we would have space, and also when I heard I could meet you and we could have this conversation.
SALTZ: That's why I said yes, because I never interview artists. Ever. I always think I don't want them to tell me what they think; I want to say what I think. You made your work, now I want to tell you what I see. And in your latest work especially, I see real art.
JR: Thank you. I could speak for hours like this, because for me, there's no taboo subject; it's about how deep you go.
SALTZ: No taboo. Radical vulnerability. Time to push the outer boundaries of what you can do now.
JR: Exactly.

BLOCKBUSTER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ADRIENNE RAQUEL



FEBRUARY PLAYMATE

Join February Playmate—and Army veteran and future politician—**Chasity Samone** for a night of cinematic splendor

As a kid, I used to tell on my brother for stealing our dad's PLAYBOY magazines. But then I saw that Naomi Campbell issue—the one where she's riding a giant chocolate Playboy Rabbit—and it made me think, I'm going to do that. I'm going to model for PLAYBOY.

I grew up in Dallas as number seven out of 11 children—seven girls and four boys. It was a little bit chaotic, but we were like a big happy *Brady Bunch* family. (Even today, we all live within a seven-mile radius.) My father was a veteran, and when I graduated from high school I followed in his footsteps and enlisted in the Army. I went to Fort Jackson and was basically a human-resource specialist. "Paper pushers" is what they used to call us. I learned a lot about breathing, actually; I learned that it's the most essential thing in life and works for everything. I was an expert shooter because I had good breathing techniques.

After I decided not to re-enlist, modeling really just fell into my lap. An agent posted a photo of me on Facebook, like, "Who is this girl?" All my friends started tagging me, and then the agent asked me to do a shoot with her. I did it, and I haven't stopped since.

I want people to feel something when they look at my pictures. A lot of people are inspired by my art, and that's why I'm in love with it: because I inspire.

It's liberating to shoot nude, and I feel powerful embracing my sexuality. It's an emotional experience for me because I didn't see a lot of women like me celebrated on a platform like this. I hope my pictorial inspires other women to feel powerful and beautiful in the same way. (As far as my shoot, Adrienne Raquel was absolutely amazing—one of the most talented photographers I've ever worked with. She made me feel both confident and comfortable in my own skin.)

I'm excited to use my platform in PLAYBOY because I want young black women to see themselves represented. As much as the industry has changed in recent years, there's still a lot of work to be done. Just a few weeks ago I worked with a makeup artist who didn't have the right foundation for my skin color, so clearly beauty standards need to be expanded. That's why I'm still modeling.

My long-term goal is to be a politician. I'm going to run for city council in Dallas and just move on up from there. Equal pay is one of the biggest things I would look at—it's insane that black women earn 61 cents to every white man's dollar—but there are so many local issues I want to address, like redlining and access to education. (I grew up in the hood, and my school never even got good books; my friend went to a "good school" where everything was new.) I would love to be a part of that change for future generations.

To all the girls looking through PLAYBOY the same way I looked at Naomi Campbell 20 years ago, I want to tell you: You can do it. It's possible. *Anything* is possible.




EXIT
fresh
POP CORN
DELICIOUS
NUTRITIOUS















BIRTHPLACE: Oak Cliff, Texas **CURRENT CITY:** Los Angeles, California

ON THE WRITTEN WORD

Right now I'm reading about emotional intelligence, and it's helping me learn the ways people adjust to the world and why. People need to understand that most of our emotions come from childhood, and toxic emotions and trauma change the way people behave. Oh, and my favorite author is Malcolm Gladwell.

ON FAITH

My mom and dad were both Baptists, and I was raised going to church every Sunday and Wednesday like a real Southern girl. As an adult, faith is everything to me. And I know that faith without work is dead, so prayer is part of my daily routine.

ON NUDITY

I love it. I helped my mom and sisters get comfortable with themselves because I always walk around naked. I don't care, I really don't. When I get out of the shower, I like to air dry. I'll probably even forget that I'm naked—and that people have a problem with that.

ON VOYEURISM

My guilty pleasure is watching YouTube videos of people eating. Not cooking shows. Not ASMR. Just eating. I can watch it all day.

ON STYLE

How would I describe my personal style? Sexy. I like my boobs. Feeling sexy makes me feel strong, untouchable and powerful—like a *queen*.

ON BEDROOM EQUALITY

If I have sex and he doesn't bother to make me come, that's a deal breaker! I wouldn't have sex with that person again, even if I loved him. That's equality right there! Also, men don't think we use toys and vibrators, but don't be afraid to get out a machine and do what you have to do. It's great for couples to experiment with toys together.

ON MUSIC

I'm obsessed with a pop artist from London named Bree Runway. She writes her own music, and she's iconic to me! I'm still patiently waiting for Rihanna to drop her next album—like, bitch, it's taking you so long! I'm also listening to Summer Walker, Ari Lennox, Beyoncé, Megan Thee Stallion and Saweetie. Saweetie is fire; that's my bitch.

ON ROLE MODELS

As a kid, I always looked up to my dad. He was the ultimate: He took care of my mom and all 11 children. He had certain quotes he'd say to each of us, and the one he picked for me was "Do the right thing." It's my daily reminder.







FEBRUARY 2020 PLAYMATE



FEBRUARY 2020 PLAYMATE



a very millennial scandal



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KANYA IWANA**

Sex, nudes and social media took down the woman who represented a moderate future for Democrats. Now she's ready to stand up again, freer than ever

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

In early October, in the quiet commuter town of Santa Clarita, California, I spent a balmy afternoon with then congresswoman Katie Hill. It was exactly two weeks before intimate photos of her began to trickle out of the dark, far-right corners of the internet and about three weeks before she would announce her resignation.

At that time, this story was shaping up to be very different from the one you're about to read. I would shadow Hill, a Democrat, throughout the valley she calls home, giving an inside look at the challenges young women face when they enter the political sphere. I would observe the bright, shiny parts, such as Hill meeting special-education students at a local elementary school, giving a commencement address at a college and attending a charity fund-raiser for children with cancer. I would hear tip-of-the-iceberg hints of her struggles, such as fighting to speak without being interrupted at a Chamber of Commerce meeting and being told to smile more by constituents. I wasn't expecting anything to twist the arc I had already outlined of a millennial woman ascending to the halls of power.

Then, on October 17, I received a call from a staffer who sounded harried, asking that I refrain from mentioning in the piece Hill's ongoing divorce from Kenny Heslep, her partner of nearly 10 years. It was implied he had become increasingly volatile. I felt apprehensive after the call; I sensed something was coming but wasn't sure what it might be.

The next day, the conservative site RedState published a blog post detailing a consensual polyamourous affair the congresswoman and Heslep had had with a campaign staffer. The post also included a nude photo of Hill. It was soon followed by a piece in the British tabloid *Daily Mail,* where more photos were released. They spread across social media like wildfire—just as multiple literal fires were raging across southern California.

"We found out they had 700 more files," Hill would later tell me over the phone. "I just didn't know how long this was going to go on, or what else they were going to have, or how I was going to be able to do the work that mattered to people in my district."

Suddenly, a story that was supposed to be straightforward was radioactive. No one knew how to address this uniquely millennial "sex scandal," and few wanted to touch it. A local assemblyperson who had agreed to be interviewed backed out. A member of Congress whom I'd already spoken to scrambled to retract their statements. On-the-record sources quickly became background or off the record completely. By the time I filed, Hill had given her farewell address from the floor of the House of Representatives, and Heslep, according to his father, had denied leaking the images, claiming he'd been hacked. I watched in real time as Hill's freshman promise was taken down in a dazzling conflagration that could only exist at the intersection of sex, power and technology.

Hill was part of a great new hope, a wave of young progressives who had been ushered into the 116th Congress in the aftermath of Hillary Clinton's presidential loss in 2016. Her underdog campaign was proof of the resilience and resourcefulness of millennials—proof that when we fight, we can sometimes win.

For Hill's generation in particular, her ousting sparks a special kind of dread; it feels either very familiar or very possible. Millennials are the internet generation, after all. As Republican congressman Matt Gaetz suggested in a tweet amid the scandal, who among us would look good if a vengeful ex-lover shared every intimate photo or text? In this brave new digital world, lapses in judgment and moments of abandon are forever catalogued, waiting to be deployed should someone ever come into power or just happen to be a woman.

"I hate that they won. I hate that I did end up quitting, but the GOP made it clear that they were going to continue this until I quit," Hill says.

By the time this profile hits newsstands, I imagine people will likely have come to their own conclusions. So this isn't just a story about Katie Hill the victim of alleged revenge porn, or Katie Hill the hashtagged



cautionary tale. This is about Katie Hill the congresswoman—the Katie Hill her 700,000 constituents lost when she was driven out by cyber exploitation. And this is about Katie Hill the survivor.

• • •

The first time I formally met Hill was in her Santa Clarita office. The space was sparsely decorated save for a few framed photographs, one of which was of the nearby Vasquez Rocks. Hill occupied offices across the 25th Congressional District, about a half hour north of Los Angeles and comprising the cities of Santa Clarita, Palmdale, Lancaster and Simi Valley.

Hill has a direct manner of speaking that some might describe as brusque. She often wears a severe, unflappable expression that has been referred to as "resting bitch face," otherwise known as "a face" on men. She walks at a fleet-footed pace, opting to take the stairs whenever she can; as a public official, she never had time to exercise. In a different world these characteristics would be genderless, but during her time as a candidate and then a congresswoman, they took on a weight she often found exasperating.

"You instantly have criticism about every single bit of your attire, your face, your makeup, your hair," she said, gesturing toward the tightly secured bun sitting atop her head.

When the now 32-year-old Hill unseated Republican incumbent Steve Knight in November 2018 in a hotly contested race, the win made national headlines. Someone who never thought she would be a politician was thrust into a spotlight that felt all the more blinding because she was a woman and even more so because she was openly bisexual and the first LGBTQ congresswoman from California. This was no small feat in a district where Proposition 8, the same-sex-marriage ban, had passed overwhelmingly just a decade earlier.

Hill recalled other LGBTQ representatives advising her to pass as straight. "They said, 'You're married to a man. Why would you come out as bi?' "

In the year following her election, the former nonprofit director spent her days shuttling back and forth across her district and the country. Spending more than half her time in Washington, D.C., Hill turned into a nomad in her hometown—the place where she learned to ride a horse, experienced young love and suffered through the requisite ill-advised bob cut of late girlhood. The confusion that accompanies such a lifestyle shift became evident when she mistakenly referred to Washington as her home before catching herself. "I'm literally on a plane, on an average week, for 12 hours," she told me.

A closer look at the district she represents reveals communities that are so disparate, it's astounding she engaged enough voters to pull off a win. There's upper-middle-class Santa Clarita with its beloved Six Flags Magic Mountain theme park; the high-desert cities of Palmdale and Lancaster with their growing Latino populations; and traditionally conservative Simi Valley, a bedroom community for Los Angeles County police. Hill mentions the 1992 trial there of the LAPD officers charged with use of excessive force during their arrest of Rodney King—and the L.A. riots following their acquittal.

The demographics of the district are difficult to thumbnail, but so is Hill. She's a gun owner, an outspoken member of the LGBTQ community, a goat farmer, a sexual-assault survivor, a proud community college graduate and the daughter of a cop who cast his first vote for a Democrat when she ran.

As I trailed Hill through an average day in the district, attending speaking engagements and meetings at places that ranged from a virtually all-white country club to the diverse California Institute of the Arts campus to a majority minority trade school, I witnessed her seamlessly navigate the different enclaves. For the college visit she sported a T-shirt and jeans. Upon arriving at Valencia Country Club for a Chamber of Commerce town hall and spotting a DRESS CODE ENFORCED stencil on a window, she grabbed a suit from a staffer's car kept on hand for just such an occasion.

Besides the code-switching required of any politician who represents a district as mixed as the 25th, Hill's biggest challenge was translating to her constituents the work she does on Capitol Hill—namely, her push for affordable housing and health care reform. In an age of fringe politics, she often comes across as a kitchen-table moderate.

"When the two most commonly known names are Donald Trump and AOC, and people tend to associate an entire group with one or the other, I don't think that's necessarily healthy," she said. "A lot of what's happening in the middle, which is the majority of the country, is not amplified."

I asked Hill if the ascent of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as the most recognizable face of the Democratic Party had led to misperceptions. She replied that some people have the responsibility to "push us as far as we can go," but it's not usually a reflection of where the party currently leans.

"Her policies are the extreme of our party," she added of Ocasio-Cortez. "People have associated that the Democrats want to have the Green New

Deal, right? But they don't know that we also have all these other, more immediately achievable solutions to addressing climate change."

Hill's pragmatic progressivism was what made her stand out in a divided Congress and what our political landscape will sorely miss with her resignation. Following her win in 2018, she quickly built a reputation as a bridge, with D.C. outlets touting her unusual ability to cross the aisle. She represented something Capitol Hill has lacked since Republicans won back the House during Barack Obama's first term.

• • •

On the afternoon of our first interview in October, Hill asked if she could hitch a ride with me back home. I assumed she meant the three-acre Agua Dulce ranch she once shared with her former partner. Instead she directed us to a quiet residential street in Santa Clarita lined with craftsman houses. As we pulled into the driveway, a German shepherd named Thaddeus bounded up to greet Hill, followed by her mother.

In the midst of her divorce from Heslep, the politician whose campaign Vice News termed "the most millennial ever" was doing a very millennial thing: moving back in with her parents.

Unlike most citizens, Hill didn't have the luxury of riding out the tough moments of divorce in private. As soon as she was elected one of the 435 representatives in the House, her life became openly dissected and derided for all who disagreed with her political affiliations.

"It's a weird thing, that you have to navigate being public, because it is public, right? He filed, and it was immediately picked up in the media," she told me at the time.

Hill is unsure if she'll ever consider marriage again. In light of everything that has unfolded, it would be short-sighted to assume her career didn't factor into the end of her relationship.

"If I want to be good in this role, I will not be in a position of ever putting someone else's needs first," she said. "In the pyramid of things, it's going to be my constituents, then myself, to be able to live. And then your partner comes after that."

I didn't ask about Heslep again.

• • •

Three days after her resignation, I call Hill as she prepares to leave Washington, vowing to take her battle "outside the halls of Congress" in a heartfelt video posted on Twitter. The crisis is still fresh, the hurt still raw, and she hasn't had time to reflect. She hasn't spoken to other reporters yet, and she preemptively apologizes if she sounds "mildly incoherent."

Hill tells me a few freshmen members of Congress are planning something for her that

“This is a true **threat.** This is its own form of **assault.**”



evening. Her voice cracks as she struggles to find the words to describe it, perhaps wanting to avoid "good-bye party" or anything that feels final. Sighing, she settles on "little get-together."

She has been actively steering clear of Capitol Hill, lying low for security reasons, to dodge reporters and because "emotionally, it's been pretty tough."

She worries about other young women and girls who may decide not to run for public office after witnessing what she went through. Regardless of the relationship with her campaign staffer, her fate was decided by the photographs—not because of a consensual polyamorous relationship. If not for the proliferation of these images, it's likely Hill would still be in office.

"That's the thing I'm most concerned about," she says. "There's a whole generation of us who have pictures that could be compromising. It's normal, right? It's not even, 'Oh, it's so salacious.' Everybody does it."

In Hill's case, the photos were published without her consent or knowledge, but the average millennial would barely bat an eyelash at the willing exchange of such images—emphasis on *willing*. A 2017 study from the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative found that roughly one in eight participants had been either victims of or threatened with "nonconsensual pornography." Our nation's laws are fighting to keep up: Forty-six states, Washington, D.C. and the U.S. territory of Guam have passed legislation that criminalizes the publication of revenge porn.



Hill, who worked in the nonprofit sector before running for Congress, plans to partner with an advocacy organization to raise awareness of the havoc revenge porn can wreak. "The emotional trauma that it causes people is pretty much untold. This is a true threat. This is its own form of assault," she says.

Hill wasn't the only one who faced harassment with the release of the photos; staffers in her congressional and district offices had to field an onslaught of offensive phone calls.

"They'll talk to the staff and be like, 'Will you tell Katie Hill I want in on one of the threesomes she's having, but also she should get a boob job?' "

Ultimately, it wasn't sensational headlines or harassment on social media that prompted her decision to resign. It was her mother's advice.

"She said to me, 'You've done a ton, and you're going to be able to do more, but at the end of the day, you don't have to put yourself through this. You're young.' She always sees me as her daughter first, and she saw how awful it was."

Hill says her mom frequently sends her inspirational memes, the saccharine kind many of our boomer-age mothers exchange on the social media graveyard of Facebook. After our call, she forwards me one her mother shared with her when she was considering resignation.

"When something goes wrong in your life, just yell 'plot twist' and move on," shouts the digital pep talk in a funky font.

Hill, who admits that she could be more appreciative of her parents, seems comforted by these words.

"This is a big plot twist, so let's see what the character makes of it," she says. "That's my job."

Before we end the call, I ask whether, despite everything that has happened to her, she might consider running for political office again. I brace for a measured no—an echo of what we've heard from other female politicians cheated out of an elected position, such as Stacey Abrams and even Hillary Clinton. She replies, "Obviously, I'm going to need some time away, but it's almost something I want to do on principle."

She suggests there might be some freedom in having her private life tossed out into the world. With no skeletons left to uncover, she could become unassailable.

"Every single bit of my dirty laundry will be out there—the most private things I didn't ever think would come out. I'll be quite literally fully exposed to the voters," she says with a laugh. "So judge me for what I've got."

She finishes the thought: "This was a chapter that was important and that meant something. I think I have a legacy that is going to matter. This is just the beginning." And with that, her very milliennial political scandal ends with an ageless political message: hope.



Jim Carrey, *For Goodness Sake,* 2019. Acrylic-paint pens and water-based markers on sketch paper.

IN THE YEAR 2120, ONE MAN LOOKED INTO THE FUTURE AND SAW ONLY DOOM.

BUT THAT MAN, THE EARTH'S RICHEST, "SELF-MADE" MULTITRILLIONAIRE MICAH VEERMAN, HAD A VISION:

V.M.S. FRUTATION

VEERTECH

LEAVE THE DYING EARTH BEHIND AND TAKE HUMANITY'S FUTURE INTO HIS OWN HANDS...AMONG THE STARS!

GAZILLIONAIRE: 7120

by MATT LUBCHANSKY

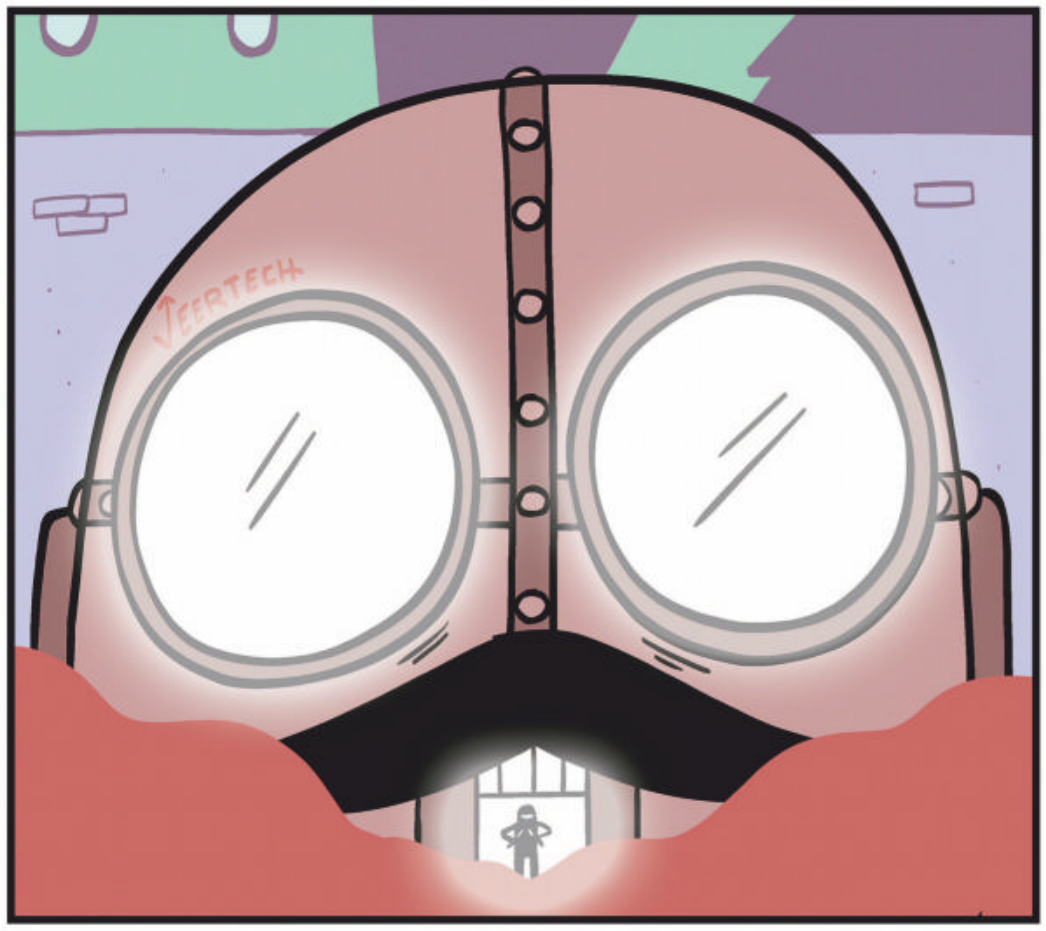
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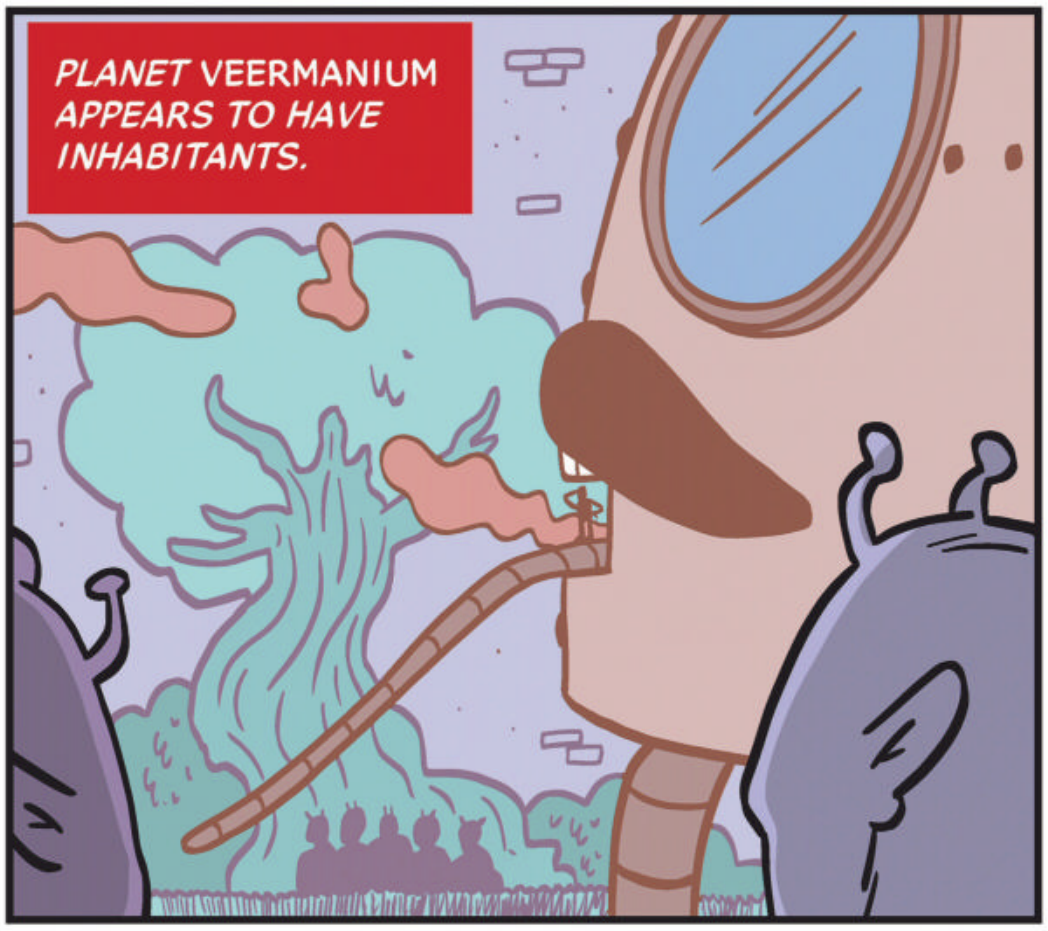
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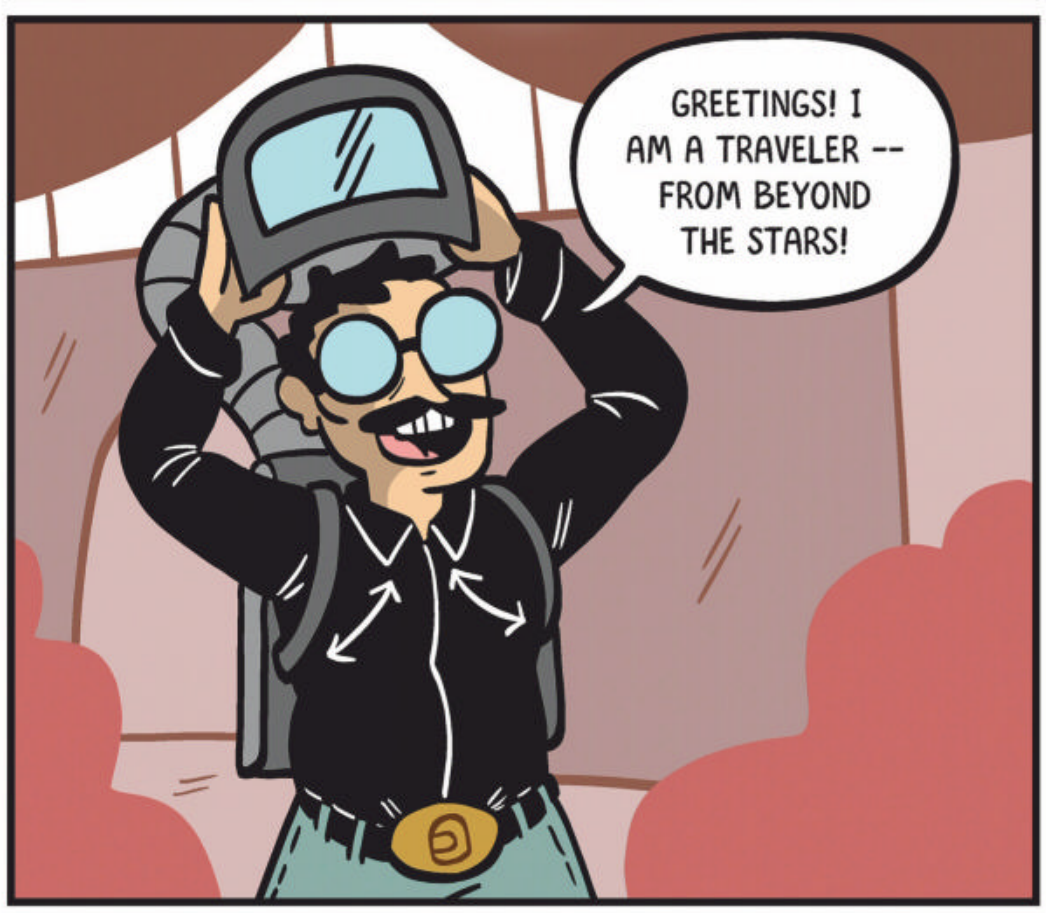
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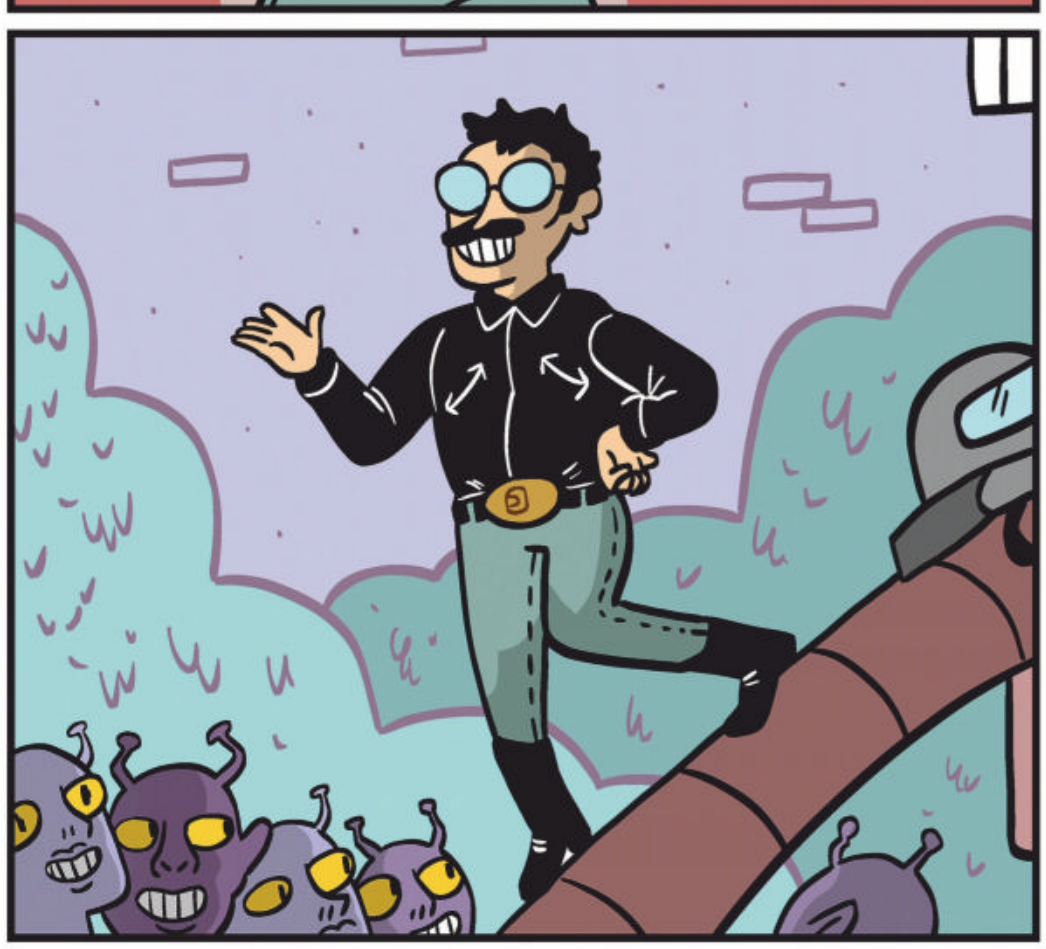
HAVE TAKEN LANDER TO SURFACE TO ASSESS WHETHER THE PLANET, WHICH I'VE CHRISTENED VEERMANIUM, IS A GOOD HOME FOR SEED DNA -- MINE.


VEERTECH


PLANET VEERMANIUM APPEARS TO HAVE INHABITANTS.


GREETINGS! I AM A TRAVELER -- FROM BEYOND THE STARS!


THEY SEEM RECEPTIVE TO MY PRESENCE -- I FORESEE RISING HIGH IN THIS PRIMITIVE SOCIETY.



FEBRUARY 2. I'M BEING SHOWN AROUND SOME SORT OF FESTIVAL. MY CONCERNS ARE MOUNTING.

I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE: WHAT...*GENDER* IS EVERYONE?

IT WOULD HELP ME IN THAT REGARD IF YOU ALL WOULD WEAR SOME *CLOTHING*...

I'M SORRY, MICAHVEERMAN, THAT WORD ISN'T COMING THROUGH OUR TRANSLATORS. *JENNDERR?*

HMM. AND I'M NOT SEEING ANYONE *PAY* FOR ANYTHING.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

AM BEGINNING TO SUSPECT THIS SOCIETY IS EVEN MORE PRIMITIVE THAN I THOUGHT.

WHAT'S THE VALUE OF ONE OF THESE THINGS?

VRRRRR

THEY MOST LIKELY NEED MY STRONG HAND.

VALLYEW? YOU MAY HAVE THE [illegible] IF YOU'D LIKE. ALL WANTS ARE ACCOUNTED FOR HERE!

VRR VRR

CLAP CLAP CLAPCLAPCLAP

IT'S *VERY* PLEASURABLE. SEE, MICAHVEERMAN?

VRRR

FOR MINE IS THE VERY HAND OF THE FREE MARKET!

NO!

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT OR WHO IS *WORTH MORE?* AND GOD, WHERE'S YOUR *SHAME?!*

OH, I SEE...YOU ARE REFERRING TO ⊂◎ㄣ⊃コ◎ヲ:;-;... HMM...

PANT PANT

IT'S POSSIBLE THEIR SPEECH IS JUST MIMICRY...

PERHAPS THE TRANSLATORS ARE BROKEN...

EITHER WAY, THEIR LITTLE THOUGHTS ARE *ADORABLE.*

WE ARE SORRY. YOU MAY BE MORE SUITED FOR THE ユ⊂◎ヨ(ヒヲ:o·Z·Z。

THE WHAT...?

CLIK!

SIGH....

PUT THEM WITH THE *OTHERS.*

HEY! I DON'T DESERVE THIS!

DON'T YOU KNOW *WHO I AM?*

CAPTAIN'S LOG. DATE UNKNOWN. MY SITUATION HAS CHANGED FOR WHAT I ASSUME IS THE BETTER.

PAFF!

SO...DO *YOU GUYS* THINK YOU NEED A *PRESIDENT?*

CEO...?

END.

LUBCHANSKY

THE CLUB

OPENER BY **GARY PERCIVAL**

On the need to shift the abortion rights debate from "My body, my choice!" to one that recognizes men as equal beneficiaries

BY **SHIRA TARRANT**

As a professor, a writer and an editor who has contributed to various texts on sexuality, including 2013's *Men Speak Out: Views on Gender, Sex and Power* and 2015's *New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics and the Law,* I receive many unsolicited e-mails from men filled with provocative subject matter, confessions about private proclivities and various forms of the question "Am I normal?" When it comes to pornography specifically, men are eager to share their experiences and opinions. But when it comes to consent or sexual assault? Crickets. The same goes for the subject of abortion.

I've recently been posing a question to my male friends, and I'd like to ask PLAYBOY's male readers the same: Have you thought about abortion lately? You know, the one your girlfriend had in high school? Or maybe the woman was your fiancée, and her family was conservative and religious? Has a one-night stand (what was her name again?) ever texted you, asking for $300? Do you know for certain whether any of the women in your family have had abortions?

If you're a man, odds are you haven't had to spend much time reflecting on the personal benefits of abortion, including the numerous ways in which women's access to the safe and (for now) legal procedure enhances your life. Not giving much consideration to abortion, I would argue, is a double privilege of benefiting from abortion yet not being expected to talk about it. There's no #ShoutYourAbortion campaign for men on Instagram and no #YouKnowMe hashtag wielded by male activists on Twitter. When journalist Liz Plank asked men to describe their experiences with abortion on Twitter in May 2019, she received only a smattering of disclosures among the predictable pushback from anti-choice tweeters and trolls.

As things stand, women bear the stigma for aborting and the shame of disclosing it. With abortion rights regressing in many states, women now even face scrutiny from some feminists who believe they have a duty to speak about their abortions publicly.

Men, meanwhile, benefit from this emotional labor. A man who goes through an abortion with his partner isn't expected to defend that decision. Men are not expected to "shout" about it. Men do not have to indicate their experience with abortion on basic health forms that collect their personal medical history. Generally, physicians don't ask men about their engagement with previous pregnancies during a medical intake, a conversation that could be an opportunity to provide accurate reproductive-health information. Nobody assumes men are whispering their abortion stories over steins of beer. Men aren't expected to share their experiences with abortion during intimate conversations with their partners when deciding to create a family or remain child-free. Men's freedom to evade this scrutiny? It adds up to a lot of saved mental and emotional bandwidth.

And yet, nearly one in four women terminate a pregnancy by the time they turn 45. That means as many as one in four men may have experienced abortion. Where legal, abortion services are provided to women from all walks of life, all incomes and all religions. Fifty-nine percent of services are provided to women who are already mothers. While bodily integrity and the right to privacy are core to many legal debates (with the latter being the basis of *Roe v. Wade*)—and

Legal access to abortion services undoubtedly benefits any man whose sexual partner wants an abortion and safely receives one.

while the decision to terminate a pregnancy must remain the right of women whose bodies are affected—behind nearly every abortion stands a man. That raises a question: Why is one of the greatest human rights battles of our generation a gendered issue? And why aren't we as a society doing more to include men in the fight?

For one, it may be because men's experience with abortion is both understudied and underreported. Katie Watson, author of the 2018 Oxford University Press book *Scarlet A: The Ethics, Law and Politics of Ordinary Abortion,* coined the term *abortion beneficiary* to describe "people who didn't terminate a pregnancy themselves but benefited from the fact someone else did." As Watson explains, the web of abortion beneficiaries is vast. It includes men who, given options, intentionally choose parenthood. It includes men who have enjoyed sex without worrying about contraceptive failure. It includes men who haven't had to parent grandchildren when their son or daughter couldn't. It includes men who have gone on to pursue degrees and professions, and who have earned income and built wealth, because of a decision made by a girlfriend, wife or sexual partner years before.

Researchers at the University of Utah recently collected self-reported data from men who experienced a pregnancy with a partner while under the age of 20 and compared the outcomes of those who became fathers with those who were abortion beneficiaries. Their findings, published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* in 2019, concluded that young men who avoided becoming teen fathers through abortion access had stronger educational futures. Twenty-two percent of men who were abortion beneficiaries went on to graduate from college, compared with only six percent of teen fathers, for example.

Of course, people should be able to have kids at the legal age—and be supported in doing so—notes the study's lead researcher, Bethany G. Everett. But our society and government don't do a good job of supporting new parents, teenaged or older. Neither do we do a good job of promoting maternal health and preventing neonatal death. Georgia consistently ranks among the worst in maternal mortality rates, with half the counties in the state having no ob-gyns. States with the highest rates of infant mortality—Ohio, Alabama and Mississippi, to name a few—have passed some of the country's most restrictive abortion bans. Women who are denied access to abortion are four times more likely to have incomes below the federal poverty level six months later.

What does this have to do with men's abortion benefits? All the sons of mothers

who were able to choose the timing of their pregnancies received benefits to their health and well-being from the moment they were born, no matter the subsequent circumstances of their childhood.

This should not be misconstrued as justification for men to coerce women into having abortions. Rather, the research highlights that "restricting access to abortion may have negative consequences for men whose partners desire abortion but are unable to access services," according to Everett and her team. Stated from a different angle, legal access to abortion services undoubtedly benefits any man whose sexual partner wants an abortion and safely receives one.

Abortion has existed for thousands of years, but its ties to the societal control of women's bodies is more recent. From the 1600s through the early 1800s, abortion was not criminalized in America. This changed when male physicians began opposing abortions performed by nonphysicians, such as midwives, female healers and wise women who threatened male doctors' control over the medical industry. The procedure became even more controversial when newspapers started advertising abortion preparations in the mid-1800s. Abortion then turned into a moral issue—not because of disagreement over when life begins but because a still-puritanical society worried women would take advantage of abortion services to cover up extramarital affairs. By the early 1900s almost all 50 states had passed anti-abortion laws.

A century later, a stark gap between reality and the rhetoric of men who oppose abortion pervades the national debate over female reproductive health. Sixty-one percent of men say it should be legal in all or most cases, yet the most vocal anti-abortion legislators and pro-life activists—those who are part of what *Rolling Stone*'s Jamil Smith has termed "the forced-birth movement"—are also men.

They include many Republican politicians who have gone to great lengths to eradicate abortion access while privately benefiting from it, such as Scott Lloyd, former head of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. In 2004, as a law student, Lloyd wrote a paper comparing abortion to the Holocaust. According to *Mother Jones,* classmates recall this paper as "a manifesto," as if Lloyd were on a crusade. Since then, he has attempted to block a 17-year-old rape victim from obtaining an abortion and promoted crisis pregnancy centers, which are merely fronts for anti-choice activism. But as *Mother Jones* reported in 2018, a younger Lloyd once drove an ex-girlfriend to terminate a pregnancy for which he was responsible.

Republican congressman Tim Murphy of Pennsylvania, who co-sponsored a 20-week abortion ban, resigned in 2017 after news broke that he allegedly had pressured his mistress to terminate a pregnancy. U.S. Representative Scott DesJarlais of Tennessee, a former physician, proudly claims a 100 percent pro-life voting record yet has supported two abortions for his ex-wife and reportedly pressured a 24-year-old patient—his mistress—to terminate her pregnancy. November 2010 Playmate Shera Bechard sued Elliott Broidy, a former deputy finance chair of the Republican National Committee and one of California's top Republican Party fundraisers, for allegedly failing to make good on a $1.6 million cover-up of their extramarital affair and, purportedly, an abortion.

These gentlemen had, in their minds, legitimate reasons for aborting a pregnancy; think "for therapeutic reasons" or "because the relationship wasn't going well." Their reasons may feel legitimate and deeply personal to them, but they are not unique. Such benefits are in fact among the reasons many people are staunchly pro-choice.

Given that research proves men benefit from abortion access, it's reasonable to expect men's engagement and political solidarity with pro-choice policy making. This is all the more pressing with the U.S. Supreme Court's inevitable review of *Roe v. Wade*. (The reversal of *Roe* could mean that "men go to college while women go to jail," Everett comments.) For the abortion-rights movement to result in true policy reform, and to maintain ongoing federal decriminalization, it must keep women at the center of the issue while also developing a broader focus on abortion as a non-gendered human rights issue.

The good news is that some male-led efforts to support abortion rights are under way. The MenEngage Alliance, for example, has partnered with the Sexual Rights Initiative to advance global human rights related to sexuality through advocacy with the United Nations. Men for Women's Choice, a decentralized grassroots network of male allies, encourages men around the world to support women's liberation efforts. The group explains, "All humans should have the right to autonomy and bodily integrity. For women and men, this often means the same thing, but for women it has an additional meaning: the ability to make choices regarding whether she will bear a child. We believe that no man should be able to force a woman to bear a child she does not want."

While strong forces are at work to preserve male power and advantage, anti-sexist men must continue to work against the tide and help cut through the myths and fallacies used to further women's political repression. Both forced abortion and denial of access are tools used by abusive men, according to researchers from the Guttmacher Institute and the UC Davis School of Medicine, who found that among women with a history of interpersonal violence, 74 percent experienced various forms of male control to influence their pregnancy outcome.

Galvanizing men in abortion rights politics makes sense. Women already carry the emotional and political labor around abortion rights, as well as the stigma for accessing the procedure. Women do the majority of heavy lifting to maintain access to reproductive options and sexual health care. But abortion is not a woman's issue. It is everyone's issue.

Something else to consider, if we wanted to flip the script: Anti-abortion legislation is nothing more than a penalty for having sex for both genders. It's terrifying, yes, but it's a reality more men might want to think about.



ARTWORK BY **PARTY OF ONE STUDIO**

Seizure City



The city of Los Angeles is cleaning house before the 2028 Olympics. Who's cashing in, and who's being swept under the rug? J. Brian Charles investigates L.A.'s latest transformation

The hoards of fans who once blotted out the asphalt of the Marathon Clothing store's parking lot are gone. A chain-link fence now surrounds the strip mall that was ground zero for the empire of Nipsey Hussle, the 33-year-old Los Angeles rapper who was murdered here on March 31, 2019. His death came only weeks after he and his business partners had purchased the building for $2.5 million.

On the surface, the acquisition was the latest in a series of shrewd business decisions by Hussle and his partners, another jewel in the crown for the Grammy-nominated rap star. But this was about more than business. The decision bought him time. For months, city attorney Mike Feuer had been trying to evict the Marathon Clothing store from the strip mall, which cradles the southwest corner of Crenshaw Boulevard and Slauson Avenue in the heart of South Los Angeles. The city claimed Marathon, the mall's anchor store, was a haven for members of the Crips gang.

Hussle counted himself among the Rollin' 60s Crips, whose territory covers much of the Crenshaw neighborhood. As such, he and his associates never denied the claim that members of the notorious L.A. street gang convened at the store and other adjacent businesses owned by the rapper. It was known that Hussle and his associates employed gang members in an effort to invest in both the neighborhood and its residents. These efforts won Hussle praise from celebrities including Jay-Z and Beyoncé and public officials such as Mayor Eric Garcetti and the Los Angeles Police Department's top ranks.

"He was a tireless advocate for the young people of this city and of this world," Garcetti said in a press conference following the rapper's murder, "to lift them up with the possibility of not being imprisoned by where you come from or past mistakes but the possibility of what comes in the future."

But in July 2019 *The New York Times* revealed the city had been investigating Hussle at the time of his murder. The shocking report speaks not only to contradictions in Hussle's life and death—he was allegedly killed by a man from the same gang—

Designating certain areas as **high-crime** is still an **indictment** of entire neighborhoods.

but also to the powerful forces that have shaped and continue to shape the City of Angels.

California's Interstate 10 once served as a barrier between the affluent and the working class, which is to say between white on one side and black and brown on the other. Today, with the median monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment nearly $1,400, L.A.'s young white residents are fleeing neighborhoods like West Hollywood, Santa Monica and Westwood and dipping south of the I-10, either in search of more-affordable housing or drawn to the new developments hugging the Metro, the city's quickly expanding light-rail system. At the same time, the city attorney's office has flooded property owners in South L.A. with nuisance-abatement lawsuits. Ninety-eight were filed in Feuer's first four years on the job.

The lawsuits are part of the Citywide Nuisance Abatement Program, which since 1997 has "revitalized" properties with alleged ties to criminal or gang activity. Leveraging the power of court injunctions, the program—enforced by the LAPD, the city attorney's office, the Department of Building and Safety, the Housing Department and the Planning Department—can legally force property owners to abide by new rules ranging from hiring armed security personnel to installing security cameras that face common areas or even individual apartments. Tenants are also subjected to new rules, such as registering their IDs with building security or limiting time in common areas. Violation can lead to eviction.

This is the method of policing the city was exploring in its attempt to evict the Marathon Clothing store from Crenshaw, a neighborhood that appears to be a hotbed of nuisance-abatement lawsuits due to the construction of the new Crenshaw/LAX light-rail line, which plays a central role in the Metro's expansion project. At eight and a half miles, the line will connect Los Angeles International Airport to the recently completed Exposition Line, which runs from downtown L.A. to Santa Monica beach. It's set to open in 2020.

The Marathon store is only a few hundred feet from a planned Metro stop at the intersection of Crenshaw Boulevard and Slauson Avenue. After decades of disinvestment, developers are now pouring billions of dollars into new hotels, luxury apartments and mixed-use developments. As builders hatch plans to reshape L.A., benefiting from an overcrowded city buckling in a housing crunch, the city's black and brown working-class residents find themselves in the crosshairs.

"They're taking over Crenshaw," says Zerita Jones, co-founder of the branch of the Los Angeles Tenants Union that covers Crenshaw and the adjacent neighborhoods of Baldwin Village and Leimert Park. "They are not coming in to share it with us. They are coming in to take it and move us out."

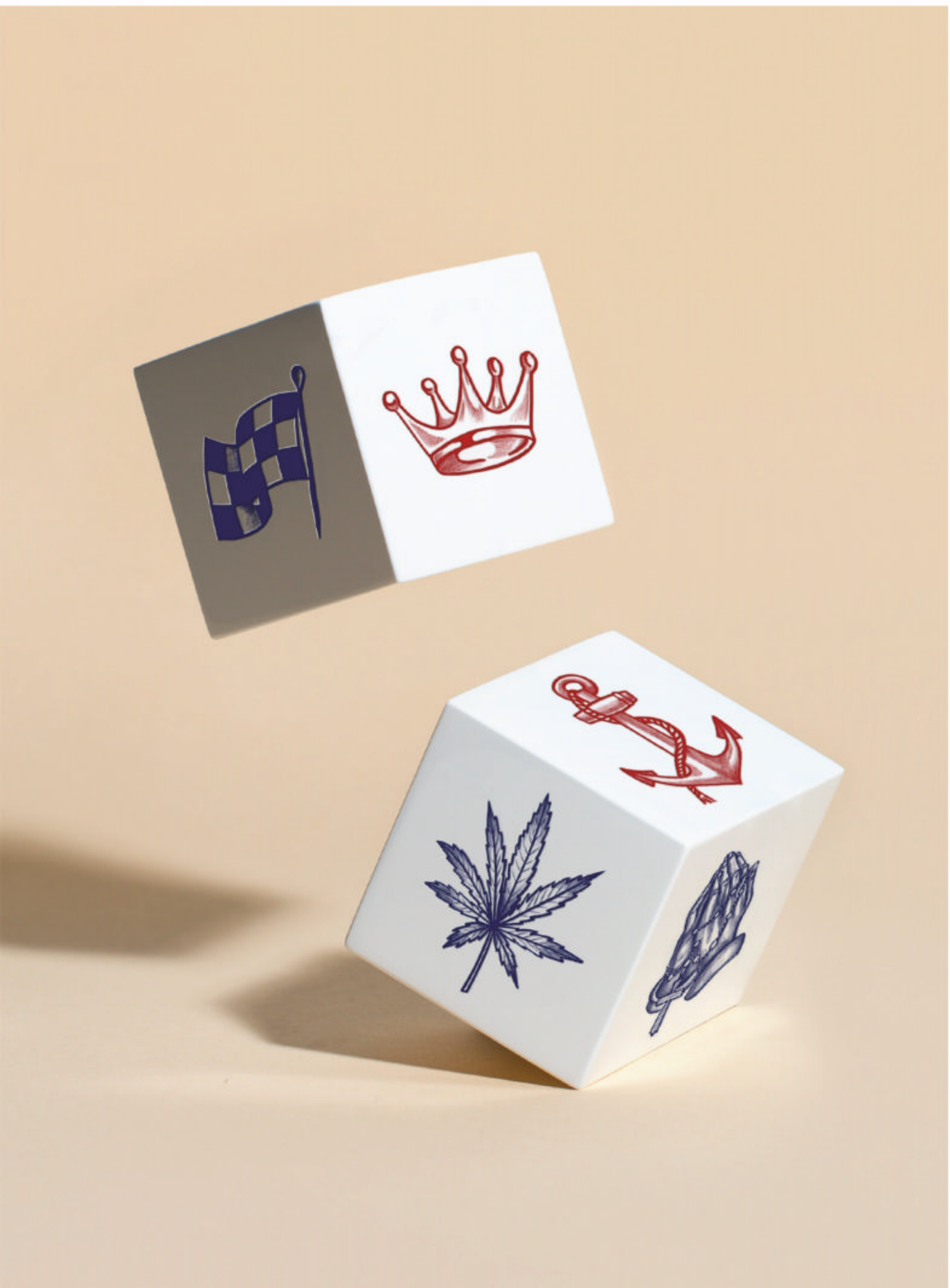
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If the smog that notoriously chokes the L.A. skyline isn't too thick, you can squint and see the Hollywood sign from Crenshaw. Just 12 miles separate the corner of Crenshaw Boulevard and Slauson Avenue from the iconic sign, but for decades they were worlds apart. The sign to the north is the beacon of a city whose most noted exports are celebrity, film and television. South of its shadow, in Crenshaw—and to a larger extent South L.A.—sits what was once an industrial hub where black and Latinx laborers churned out cars, tires and tools for the nation's war machine. These worlds have collided as L.A.'s population swells. The city has added more than 1 million residents since 1980 and is now bursting with 4 million people.

It wasn't long after Garcetti won his first mayoral election, in 2013, that he made his ambitions clear: to fix the city's transportation woes. He also wanted the Olympics to return to L.A. He tethered these goals and in 2016 convinced voters to back a half-cent sales-tax hike to fund his transit plans. "We're using the

Olympics as a rallying tool," Garcetti told *Government Technology* magazine in 2018. "By the time the world comes here, let's be the best we can. Let's get rid of homelessness on our streets, let's build out the infrastructure that we need and accelerate that, and let's leave behind a legacy: that L.A. became the healthiest city in America when it hosted the greatest sporting event in the world."

Garcetti named his plan Twenty-Eight by '28, representing the 28 transit projects that need to open before the Olympic torch is lit in summer 2028. Developers are tracing the blueprints. Where a shopping mall currently sits in South L.A., the city has approved a $700 million development that includes 961 apartments, a 400-room hotel and retail spaces. Across the street, a developer is looking to build 69 units. Another wants to build 111 more apartments down the street. All these developments are adjacent to planned stops on the Crenshaw/LAX Line. All of them will include affordable housing units—but not nearly enough to prevent displacement.



From the window of Jones's apartment on Obama Boulevard, she can see change coming. She can see the Exposition Line as it chugs west toward Santa Monica's beaches; she sees the $3.25 million investment for a new gymnasium and indoor pool at the Rancho Cienega Sports Complex and developers snatching up mom-and-pop stores every week. She can also see the demographics of her neighborhood changing.

Jones lives in Baldwin Hills' Chesapeake Apartments, where 105 buildings are spread across 17 acres. The crosscurrents of change landed at Jones's doorstep in November 2017 when the city attorney's office filed a nuisance-abatement lawsuit against the Chesapeake, claiming the property posed a threat to the public health and safety of local residents. The ensuing court order set conditions for the owner; if the owner didn't comply, the city could ask the court to close down the property, ultimately forcing a sale.

"Negligent, callous management has allowed the Chesapeake Apartments to become a hotbed of terror in this neighborhood," Feuer said in prepared remarks after filing the lawsuit. "We'll continue to hold property owners responsible for these harrowing conditions as we take back our communities."

Specifically, the 2017 lawsuit alleged that the Black P-Stones, a division of the Bloods gang, and an open drug market flourish at the Chesapeake. Residents don't dispute this. For one, the complex features a road that connects two major thoroughfares in L.A., making it prime real estate for drug dealing and, by extension, violence. To make its case that the Chesapeake is a stronghold of the Black P-Stones, the city sourced evidence on YouTube. Court documents cite a music video filmed at the Chesapeake that features aspiring rappers and alleged gang members flashing hand signs. Another music video includes scenes from a memorial for a man killed by police in a neighboring city; it shows purported Black P-Stones members brandishing handguns.

The argument that the entire complex should be deemed a gang headquarters concerns legal scholars. "The gang allegation was the most racist of the allegations," says Shayla Myers, an attorney with Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles who helped Chesapeake tenants fight the lawsuit. "The videos are an artistic expression of life in the community. To have that thrown back at them as evidence of gang activity is problematic."

In its lawsuit, the city demanded the property owner install security cameras trained on residents' entryways, the footage of which the LAPD could review without a subpoena. The city also tried to establish new "house rules" for residents, demanded that armed security guards take up posts in the complex and suggested that the owner contract a management company to help oversee the property. The injunction filed by the city asked residents to police gang activity and told the property owner to distribute rental agreements that included the new rules. Guests could spend only



limited time in common areas and were required to carry photo IDs, which had to be registered with management. If any of the house rules were violated, the property owner was expected to evict the residents.

"We were the nuisances," Jones says, "and we were the people who had to be governed and policed." Jones and her mother, Jessie Smith-Jones, intervened to fight the injunction. They claimed the terms would turn the Chesapeake into a prison. The armed security guards would only add guns to a place already marked by violence. The security cameras criminalized all residents, including the innocent. Residents acknowledged the presence of gangs in the complex, but policing was the LAPD's responsibility, tenants argued, not theirs.

The city walked back some of the conditions. Today, the security guards in the complex are unarmed and the cameras record only common areas. But residents are still being pushed out. As head of the Chesapeake's tenant association, Jones is often the first person those facing eviction call. Some fight; some don't. When they leave, the apartments are renovated and rented at market rate.

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Mike Feuer rode into the city attorney's office in the same 2013 election that vaulted Garcetti, a former city councilman, to power. Feuer's office didn't respond to requests for comment for this story, but scrolling through its website, you get the impression Feuer wants to align with a new era of progressive prosecutors. His office champions alternatives to imprisonment for teens in street gangs, diversion programs for nonviolent offenders and pop-up legal clinics for the homeless. These programs are part of L.A.'s Community Justice Initiative, or CJI—a name that suggests a softer approach to crime. In language posted online, CJI is "a neighborhood-focused array of restorative justice, alternative sentencing and diversionary programs." Nuisance-abatement lawsuits are categorized within CJI as "administrative citation enforcement."

In his first term, Feuer appeared to have borrowed heavily from two of his predecessors: James K. Hahn, who was city attorney for 16 years before becoming L.A.'s 40th mayor in 2001, and Rocky Delgadillo, who succeeded Hahn as city attorney and served from 2001 to 2009. In 1989 Hahn laid out plans to use the city attorney's office to tackle L.A.'s gang problem. He wanted to implement the criminological theory known as "broken windows." A social science term coined in 1982, it gained traction among law enforcement in the 1990s but has since been discredited. The idea is to snuff out minor infractions such as loitering and drinking on the sidewalk with the goal of not just rounding up small-time offenders before they commit major crimes (a theoretical certainty) but signaling to the community that cops won't tolerate infractions of any kind.

Where Hahn's tactics differed was his idea to use civil courts via nuisance lawsuits rather than criminal courts as a hammer against crime. The city would move for an injunction to bar alleged gang members from congregating in areas covered by the injunction. This criminalized innocuous gatherings such as family cookouts should two alleged gang members be there.

Those facing civil injunctions have no right to an attorney. Rather than proving cases beyond a reasonable doubt, city attorneys have to prove only that the majority of evidence supports their claims. Once the injunction is in place, those who violate it may later face criminal charges.

Delgadillo's pursuit of street crime differed in that his office

targeted homes, businesses and properties. Those plans landed heavily on downtown L.A.'s homeless population. Meanwhile, cops got tougher on the streets. William Bratton, another supporter of broken-windows policing, became LAPD police chief in 2002. He launched the Safer Cities Initiative, which flooded downtown L.A. with an additional 50 cops on patrol. This was classic broken windows. Cops handed out 12,000 fines for small offenses in the first year; a 2011 survey by the Los Angeles Community Action Network found that more than half the people living in the Skid Row area had been arrested in the past year.

Upon taking office, Feuer moved forward with an injunction his predecessor had filed against people with alleged gang ties in Echo Park, a gentrified Latinx neighborhood on L.A.'s east side. In June 2013 the city attorney's office filed a permanent injunction against known members of six gangs. But the effort faced blowback from activists and civil rights attorneys. Chief U.S. District Judge Virginia A. Phillips ruled in 2018 that the injunction violated the due process rights of thousands and compelled the city to toss the remaining 1,400 names off the injunction list. (According to the *Los Angeles Times,* almost 9,000 people had faced injunction enforcement since 2000.)

By that time, Feuer's strategy had shifted from targeting alleged gang members to targeting property associated with gang activity. "When we even think about the Citywide Nuisance Abatement Program, it's a lawsuit against the property," says Jamie Garcia, an organizer with the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. "That's how the city takes its hands off, i.e., 'We are not targeting people.' When you hear LAPD's rhetoric, they go after location-based policing." It's a distinction without a difference, Garcia argues. Targeting land, designating certain areas as high-crime and filing property nuisance suits are still indictments of entire neighborhoods.

The city's practices are buttressed by state law. Shortly after Feuer took office, Governor Jerry Brown signed two laws that expanded the power of cities to evict tenants for certain nuisance violations, including one that allows a city to evict a tenant based on an arrest report, even if the person wasn't convicted. The legislation was backed by the California Apartment Association.

When you couple Feuer's use of civil actions with LAPD's policing tactics, the city has powerful tools to remove people from within its borders. Until April 2019 one such tool was the Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Restoration program, or LASER, which the LAPD phased out after eight years. LASER focused on identifying and monitoring chronic offenders. To get off the list, a person had to avoid police contact, which is difficult because LASER increases policing in so-called anchor points—locations where several people on the list live, work or socialize. It's the same type of regulation used against the Chesapeake. "It became very clear it was about land and displacement," Garcia says.

Garcia's colleague, Hamid Khan, founder of Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, elaborates: "Such practices are a continuation of policy over time," he says. "Broken windows may be discredited, but it serves as a template for what's happening now."

Fragments of broken windows pop up in other cities too. The Department of Justice found that Ferguson, Missouri, where a cop killed teenager Michael Brown in 2014, collected more than $2.4 million in fines in 2013, largely tied to minor infractions such as parking and housing-code violations. The city issued more than 9,000 arrest warrants for unresolved fines in 2013 alone.

Former South Bend mayor and presidential hopeful Pete Buttigieg, an alumnus of consulting firm McKinsey & Company, has been criticized for his 1,000 Houses in 1,000 Days program, which forced the rehab or demolition of more than 1,000 homes in the city. The city dispatched code-enforcement officers, and the amount of fines jumped 25 percent, with more than $500,000 collected in a single year.

The program hit black and Latinx residents hard. Many came to own their homes through inheritance or investing in low-income neighborhoods. Some had been trapped in zombie mortgages. When the city assessed fines, some residents walked away.

South Bend, where about 45 percent of residents are in minority groups, has one of the highest eviction rates in the country. The city has yet to study the impact of the program on black, Latinx or low-income communities, but Buttigieg, in his political memoir, *Shortest Way Home: One Mayor's Challenge and a Model for America's Future,* writes that "the most important impact of the effort was unquantifiable. Hitting such an ambitious goal made it easier for residents to believe we could do very difficult things as a city, at a time when civic confidence had been in short supply for decades."

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Hussle's voice booms from cars stopped at Crenshaw and Slauson. His face is on T-shirts worn by the men and boys walking the streets. On another corner, his face stares at traffic from a mural on the wall of a bank. In the global rap world, Kendrick Lamar may be king of L.A., but even in death, Hussle rules over Crenshaw.

The Marathon store was the face card in a broader business plan, which now includes a co-working space, a business incubator and a STEM lab. "If [South L.A.] is to ever be in the condition it deserves—if our people are to ever be treated the way they deserve to be treated—we have to own and build it for ourselves," said Marqueece Harris-Dawson, who represents Crenshaw on the Los Angeles City Council, after Hussle's death.

Hussle's business partner, David Gross, declined to be interviewed for this story, but he has publicized his fight against the city on social media. His plans for the Marathon Clothing store location: a mixed-use project called Nipsey Hussle Tower. This permanent memorial will serve as both a tribute to the neighborhood and a send-up of outside forces vying for control. Those forces may prevail, Jones says, "but the question is, are we going to allow it to happen, or are we going to fight?"

As Hussle would say, "The marathon continues."

sterling for all

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AARON FEAVER**



The trajectory of Sterling K. Brown has us on the edge of our seat, which is right where he wants us

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

The first time I meet Sterling K. Brown the smoke is literally clearing around him. Yes, a crew member has just turned off a hazer as production pauses for Brown to swap into another look, but the metaphor is undeniable. The actor, despite almost two decades of well-regarded work on television, has only recently become a household name, thanks to his Emmy-winning performance across four seasons of NBC's *This Is Us*. Unlike Randall Pearson—the straitlaced, civically engaged and mathematician-smart patriarch he plays on the show—Brown has natural swag and commands the room with a rich, resonant voice trained at Stanford and in regional theater nationwide. Decked out in a visual tribute to casual cool—rolled-up trousers, a gold medallion and a half-buttoned graphic-print shirt—he asks, "Can we get some more Drizzy?" He shifts from posing to dancing as Drake's "Controlla" fills the studio.

When I ask Brown how success and pop-culture notoriety have changed him, he responds quickly.

"I'm a total dick now," he tells me. "I have narrowed my peripheral vision."

Some might say this means he's more goal-oriented. Others might add that it feels like a moment of profound clarity.

In 2018 Brown launched Indian Meadows Productions, which gave him the power not just to change the narrative but to create it. The production company's namesake is the St. Louis neighborhood where Brown grew up. His mom still owns a house there, and his brothers and sisters are among the city's residents. The mission of Indian Meadows Productions is to champion racial inclusion in Hollywood, both in front of the cameras and behind them. Brown has already closed a deal with Hulu for his company to produce an adaptation of Esi Edugyan's best-selling book *Washington Black*.

"I wanted to have some sort of control over what stories could be put out to the world and take advantage of an opportunity to be one of the storytellers," Brown says. "If you don't have enough bells and whistles in terms of the right writers, the right showrunners, the right directors, the best piece of material can fall on deaf ears."

By owning the means of production, so to speak, Brown will also be able to reshape one of the most formidable barriers for black-led media: marketing. Oftentimes, films and TV programs featuring predominantly black casts are promoted only to black audiences, which can drastically reduce a project's impact. (The packaging of works by Tyler Perry, who made history in October as the first black person to independently own a studio lot, comes to mind.) Recent films such as Jordan Peele's *Us* and Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*—in which Brown plays father to Michael B. Jordan's Killmonger—have benefited from crossover appeal, both critically and at the box office, but they remain the exception. Nevertheless, the tide is shifting. The 2019 study "Inclusion in the Director's Chair," by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, features an "intersectional analysis" of 1,335 directors attached to top-grossing films between 2007 and 2018. The study determined that "16 of the directors of the top 100 movies [in 2018] were black—this historically high figure is nearly three times greater than the six black directors working in 2017 and twice as many as the eight black directors working in 2007."

Says Brown,"If you have a black movie, we need to stop selling it as if it's only for a black audience. A movie about black people can appeal to anyone. All human stories have a universal appeal when told well." One practice he has come up against in Hollywood is the casting of leading men of color opposite non-black actresses in an attempt to end-run the marketing of a film as a "black movie." Saying he "frowns upon" black actors who have typically worked opposite white or Latina leading ladies, Brown is careful when choosing projects.

"Will Smith has the strength to pair himself with whomever he wants and sell that movie globally," he says. "He can provide an opportunity to a sister to shine in a way they may not be able to if it weren't a Will Smith movie."

When projects with black casts reach











> “A **movie about** black people can appeal to anyone. All **human** stories have a universal appeal when **told well.**”



a broader audience, that of course results in more big breaks for black actors, directors and writers. Brown’s success is proof: His command on the mainstream *This Is Us* and the Ryan Murphy–produced *American Crime Story,* both of which feature relatively diverse casts, led to a lot of televised acceptance speeches. In addition to his two Emmy wins, he is the first African American to win a Golden Globe for best actor on a television drama and the first African American male actor to win a Screen Actors Guild Award for a drama series. Outside of *This Is Us* and Indian Meadows, Brown added A24’s November release *Waves* to his film résumé, nabbed a part in Disney’s colossal *Frozen* sequel and will appear on the next season of Amazon Prime’s flagship comedy *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.*

I ask Brown if, as a leader in an industry that suffers from a scarcity of opportunities for actors of color, he feels pressure to embody the punishing standard of #BlackExcellence. He tents his fingers, leans back and ventures a joke. “We got to keep it together, because they got Mekhi Phifer or Omar Epps on call, waiting to come in and replace your boy,” he says. “You spend so long feeling replaceable that it’s hard to shake that feeling.”

His television fame is concurrent with something else, something he’s learned to be unabashed about but never expected: his emergence as a sex symbol. Randall Pearson wasn’t scripted to be sexy, but thirst isn’t predictable. On Google “Sterling K. Brown shirtless” returns more than 1 million results. Some of the most over-the-top headlines include STERLING K. BROWN’S SEXY ABS SHATTER INSTAGRAM and GIVE THE PEOPLE STERLING K. BROWN’S BOOTY!

“Sneaky fit” is the term Brown uses to describe his physique. “I’m not popping out of my clothes per se, but if I ever take my shirt off, you’d be like, Oh snap, I didn’t see that one coming.” He quickly adds, “I don’t think I’ve ever gotten a job because of the way I was built. People have seen me as being a good actor, and they hire me for things in which they need a good actor.”

The hypersexuality assigned to black men has some grisly historical underpinnings that are glazed over in horny internet chatter—“It’s a slippery slope, and it’s one that is dangerous,” he says—but Brown recognizes that “it’s nice to have your sexuality celebrated, as long as you’re being celebrated in total, as a whole human being and not fetishized as one particular thing.”

In other words, “sex symbol” is not a terrible title when it’s your least impressive achievement. After years of laying the groundwork, Brown seems to have found the freedom to transcend being one thing and to embrace many personas: the total dick, the leading man, the producer, the trailblazer, even the sex symbol. No wonder audiences are mesmerized.



MARIGOLD RUSH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ALI MITTON



MARCH PLAYMATE

The journey from Laos to the United States is not so far with March Playmate and lifelong explorer **Anita Pathammavong** as your guide

Marigolds fill the pool, and I breathe in the verdant aroma as the florists trim their stems. In front of the lens I can move, flow and express myself completely.

I am naked; all around me, the energy is strong.

The confidence I feel today is the result of an ever-evolving journey of exploration and self-acceptance. Coming from a multicultural background—I was six years old when my family moved from Laos to the Virginia suburbs—I've always had a kaleidoscopic view of beauty standards, societal expectations and my own identity.

My dad first relocated to northern Virginia during the Vietnam war, and my mother went to an all-girls Catholic school in Thailand before she moved to Washington, D.C. at 17. I was raised with pretty traditional views surrounding femininity and sexuality.

The American school system wasn't much help, and my relationship to my body was mostly informed by what I saw on television. It took years of curiosity and community building to get to a place where I felt grounded and comfortable in my own skin. Even now, at the age of 23, I'm still learning new things about my body!

After high school I went to New York and immediately fell in love with the rhythm and intensity of the city. But when I started modeling, I had to compete in an industry that prioritized skinny bodies and European features. I've struggled against those biases for most of my career.

It's definitely shifted—but I don't want companies to be inclusive merely because it's a trend. I want people to lean into these conversations even though they can be uncomfortable; that's how perspectives change. People should be able to open up magazines and see models of all shapes, sizes and races. They should be able to see images of women they can relate to.

I believe that empathy is the first step toward equality. We simply cannot let discrimination be indulged and privilege weaponized to divide people. We need to take the time to listen and educate instead of coming from a place of pain and anger.

That's why one of my dreams is to invest in land in Laos. My father and I have a plan to open an orphanage and recruit teachers, because the educational system stops around middle school. And I want to start a nonprofit that will raise money to remove the leftover land mines still planted along the border of Laos and Vietnam.

I am a model with curves, a woman with Southeast Asian, Native American and European roots. I'm just proud to be me.















DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Nong Khai, Thailand **CURRENT CITY:** New York City, New York

ON PARENT TRAPS

My parents separated when we moved to the States, and my mother raised me, my older sister and my younger brother as a single mom. When I was in high school my parents actually got back together. It was a real *Parent Trap* situation (sans twin-swapping), and they've been together ever since.

ON DESTINY

I was working with my dear friend Patricia Meier-Veit, who showed me her May 1993 Playmate pictorial in PLAYBOY Germany. I decided then, "I'm going to do PLAYBOY." A few months later I was talking to my friend Fo Porter, the April 2019 Playmate, and she asked me how I would feel about posing for PLAYBOY. I told her, "I fucking love PLAYBOY! It would be a dream." Next thing I know, I have an interview with the casting director, and two weeks later I'm locked in. I honestly feel like I spoke it into existence.

ON STAYING ALOFT

I recently heard a bit of good advice: You can't fly like an eagle if you hang around with turkeys.

ON STAYING GROUNDED

In New York you're constantly absorbing different people's energies. It can become too intense if you don't remove yourself from it. I like meditating, dancing around my room and going upstate to get out of the city.

ON GUILTY PLEASURES

Cheesy romantic movies. The *Sex and the City* movie, *Pretty Woman, How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*—I love them all. *Eat Pray Love* is fucking great.

ON SPRINGING FORWARD

Spring is one of my favorite seasons because it's when things become new. Flowers bloom, the weather starts warming up.... It's a transformative time when you can finally step out of your cocoon. Spread those wings!

ON PET PEEVES

People who litter. I usually give them a really dirty look and pick up whatever they've thrown on the ground. It's somewhere between passive aggressive and fully aggressive.

ON GIVING BACK

The issues I raise awareness for are protecting indigenous people and their land, preserving the Amazon, fighting for racial justice and women's rights, and helping the environment. I look up to strong women who advocate for these causes—including Channapha Khamvongsa, the founder and executive director of Legacies of War, an organization that seeks to address the problem of unexploded ordnance in my home country of Laos.






MARCH 2020 PLAYMATE





Maly Sirin

MARCH 2020 PLAYMATE

PLAYBOY'S party jokes

THIS ISSUE'S BATCH COURTESY OF COMEDIAN AND TELEVISION WRITER DEMI ADEJUYIGBE AND FRIENDS

SOMETIMES I feel like we're really making progress toward equality. Then I remember there are dogs on Instagram that make more money than most black people.—*Edgar Momplaisir*

TWO women walk into a bar. One of them sits down and immediately apologizes to the other:

"Were you going to sit here?"

"No, I'm sorry, no!" says the other. "I want to stand."

The first apologizes for being in her way. The second apologizes for being so flustered. This continues into infinity or until one of them gets elected president in 2044.—*Tawny Newsome*

THERE'S no better sign that we need equal representation than my getting called Kumar in YouTube comments. Guys, that movie came out in 2004. If you're going to be racist, at least be topical.—*Rekha Shankar*

I didn't want to believe gentrification could happen to me, but the guy next door screams our neighborhood's walkability score every time he orgasms.—*Brittani Nichols*



A standout float in the Straight Pride Parade is the one with a bunch of guys lounging around, each one forcing his girlfriend to watch *Bloodsport* while she texts another dude.—*T.N.*

WHEN black people talk about supporting black-led films, someone always complains, "Oh, but it would be racist if I went and supported *white*-led films!" That wouldn't be racist, just expensive and time-consuming.—*Demi Adejuyigbe*

I didn't have a pen, so I signed a check with eyeliner from the bottom of my bag. That's 11th-wave radical feminism.—*Ayo Edebiri*

THE worst thing you can call a black person is the *N* word, but the worst thing you can call a white person is "cracker," which is a delicious salty treat you serve with a variety of cheeses at parties. I think that says all you need to know about equality in this country.—*B.N.*



I wish I had the confidence of a ginger telling me, "We too have faced oppression for our appearance."—*R.S.*

THE school-to-prison pipeline is so bad that when *The Shawshank Redemption*'s Andy Dufresne escaped, he ended up back in the eighth grade.—*Carl Tart*

IT'S not fair when someone says white people have always had it easy. Imagine how tough it was for them to talk about music the year that "Niggas in Paris" was big.—*D.A.*

IF a woman accepts a promotion, she is legally required to renounce the formal job title and instead be called a badass.—*R.S.*

WHICH is worse, being African American in Hollywood and getting mistaken for someone in *Black Panther* or getting no calls even to do background work in *Black Panther?*—*D.A.*

HOW do you know when a relationship is serious? When the woman takes you home to meet her vibrator.—*A.E.*

MEN should have as much control over women's bodies as desire to see the *Cats* movie: none.—*Lou Wilson*

THE PLAYBOY SYMPOSIUM

Is Hollywood keeping up with the changing mores of contemporary sexuality? In a time of simultaneous sex positivity and panic, we wanted to investigate how moviemakers are handling our country's sexual reawakening—especially when it comes to female sexuality on the big screen. So we tapped Franklin Leonard—founder of the Black List, Hollywood's heralded community of screenwriters and script buyers—for some help. What follows is a titillating survey of sex, cinema and the female gaze by the Black List's director of community, Kate Hagen. Accompanying Hagen's words: three never-before-published illustrations by artists exploring the act of sex, hand-selected by digital gallerist Love Watts.

WORDS BY **KATE HAGEN** ART CURATED BY **LOVE WATTS**

How were you first seduced by cinema?

My relationship with film began long before I could name the mesmeric desire I felt every time I turned myself over to 100 minutes of flickering passion on the screen. It wasn't until adolescence, when I started to actively seek out any movie on cable with a STRONG SEXUAL CONTENT warning, that my nascent affection for film blossomed into an eternal obsession. And once I was finally left alone to watch what I wanted, I became a cinematic-sex sleuth.

I sought movies such as *Looking for Mr. Goodbar, Bound, Wild at Heart, The Last Seduction* and *Crash* (David Cronenberg's version, of course) solely for the sex. I became entranced not only with thrillingly new perspectives on romance, relationships and intimacy but with the complex emotional narratives around them. I became addicted to the nervous fluttering in my belly when the camera pushed in on two faces I loved, their bodies clutched in electrified anticipation before a climactic fuck. I perfected the art of searching *TV Guide* listings by actor to find the finest filth the Encore Romance channel could offer on a Saturday afternoon. (Remember *Damage* with Jeremy Irons and Juliette Binoche?) I spent hours of trigonometry class daydreaming about whichever actor beguiled me at the moment. That complete list is unfit to print in any medium, but I will admit I was hot for Alan Ruck long before *Succession*.

Even now, nothing thrills me more than a great sex scene. The problem is, the steamiest sex I've seen in years, outside of porn, occurred in the sixth episode of HBO's *Euphoria*—not in a theater. With its tender, trembling Halloween tryst between the characters played by Barbie Ferreira and Austin Abrams, *Euphoria* gave me something I'd never seen before, even as a slut for cinematic smut: a fat woman receiving oral pleasure to the point of climax without it being a punch line or a punishment for her or her paramour. While I was thrilled to be consumed by a scene starring someone who looks like me, it reminded me how long it had been since I'd seen a film that made me feel even remotely the same way.

A spectacular sex scene appeals to our lusting lizard brains, but everything that unfolds around the fucking is what invites audience members to invest and empathize with the characters: the tight clasp of Linda Hamilton's and Michael Biehn's hands during their pivotal coupling in *The Terminator,* or the sobering POV shots as Jennifer Jason Leigh bids adieu to her virginity in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Through sex, we're able to gaze at our most beloved stars during moments of exceptional vulnerability, allowing deeper emotional connections—ones that can validate our own desires.

My love for on-screen erotica made me open to a variety of sexual perspectives long before I could experience them in reality. Even so, it took me three decades to feel represented sexually in film. If the most ubiquitous form of storytelling doesn't feature people to whom we can relate in their enjoyment of carnal satisfaction, how could we ever feel worthy of such a thing in real life? How could we believe we should ask for it?

I've been troubled by the state of sex in movies for the past few years. My fears are confirmed by data from IMDb: Only 1.21 percent of the 148,012 feature-length films released since 2010 contain depictions of sex. That percentage is the lowest since the 1960s. Sex in cinema peaked in the 1990s, the heyday of the erotic thriller, with 1.79 percent of all films featuring sex scenes. That half-point decline is massive in relative terms, considering almost four times as many films have been released in the 2010s as in the 1990s.

Studio releases simply aren't keeping up with the conversations about sex, gender and relationships that have been amplified by Generation Z's progressive attitudes and a #MeToo-driven cultural reckoning. Mainstream film surely isn't representative of the kinds of love and sex I experience in my life as a bisexual woman. We've only begun to flirt with respectful depictions of queer sex, kink and sex work on-screen, but those stories often live and die in the art houses. Countless nuanced perspectives remain unexplored by studios.

As I investigated the state of sex in cinema, I became frustrated with the attempts to assign blame for the slump. Scapegoats include the rise of streaming tube sites and smartphone dependence. But like the complexities of human attraction, the factors that led to the decline of sex in movies are intertwined with our own media history—both as individual viewers and as a collective audience that isn't getting laid as often as we did 20 years ago.

According to a November 2017 article in *Archives of Sexual Behavior,* American adults had sex about nine fewer times per year in the early 2010s than adults in the late 1990s. A 2016 LinkedIn study determined that entertainment is the top industry for young workers, which suggests we may be seeing less sex at the movies because Hollywood is full of undersexed millennials. (And why not blame another cultural catastrophe on millennials?) But that theory falls apart when you consider that the six major studios are run by baby boomers and Gen-Xers—who reportedly have more sex than the younger cohort. If industry gatekeepers are so sexually active, shouldn't there be more sex on release slates?

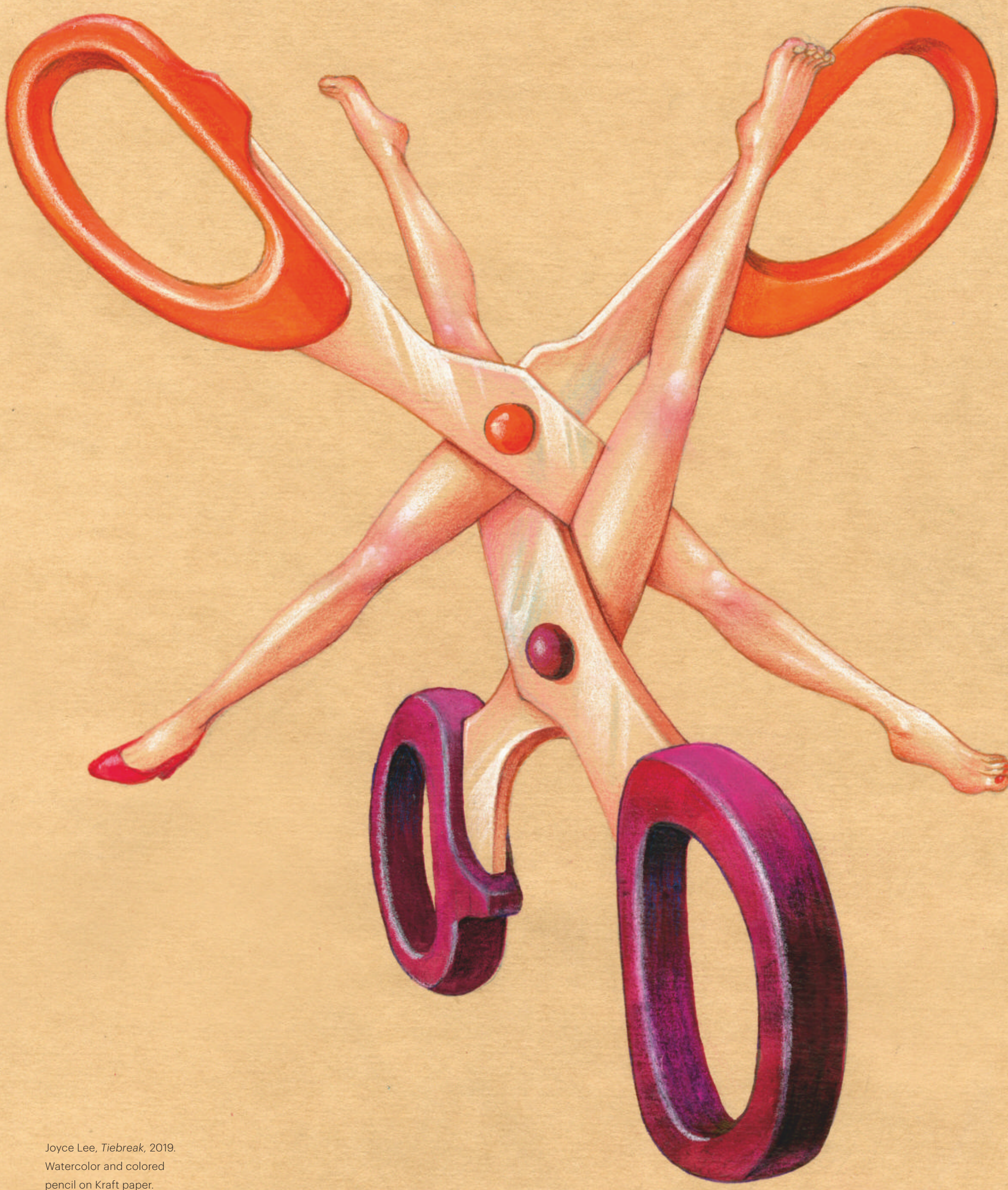
Consider the most successful erotic thriller ever made: Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction,* which grossed more than $155 million domestically and was nominated for six Academy Awards, including best picture, in 1987. With its chaotic sex, Oscar-nominated performance from Glenn Close ("I won't be ignored, *Dan*" still haunts me) and controversial climax, *Fatal Attraction* gained the kind of cultural ubiquity now reserved for franchises and IP-driven tentpoles, not middle-budget adult dramas.

To further contextualize *Fatal Attraction*'s success, its adjusted domestic box office is nearly $360 million. If released in 2019, it would be the year's sixth-highest-grossing domestic release, behind four Disney films and one Sony/Marvel/Disney crossover. There's simply no way a movie like *Fatal Attraction,* with its languorous erotic intrigue and troubling morality, could compete with a Marvel giant in our current landscape, nor gain the same awards heat.

Beyond stories with explicit eroticism, five of the 100 all-time highest domestic grossers—*Avatar, Titanic, Deadpool, Forrest*

Opposite page: Senju, *Seijo (Holy Woman),* 2019. Digital painting.





Joyce Lee, *Tiebreak*, 2019.
Watercolor and colored
pencil on Kraft paper.

Gump, Skyfall and *Twilight: Breaking Dawn–Part 2*—feature depictions of sex. At five percent, this list over-indexes when compared with the percentage of sex scenes in all movies, but with alien sex, superhero sex and vampire sex, these movies are not representative of anyone's sexual experiences (I imagine). What's more, not a single female director is responsible for these titles.

The exceptions to the major studios' sex strike are the adaptations of *Fifty Shades of Grey,* EL James's problematic fantasy about the luxury of heteronormative submission. The first *Fifty Shades* film—and the only one lensed by a woman, Sam Taylor-Johnson—grossed more than 10 times its $40 million budget. In total, all three films in the franchise made more than $1.3 billion worldwide, without showing a single penis.

Given the paucity of narratives about sexual fantasies centered on female desire, I can appreciate how the series pushed the envelope. But can the chemistry between Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan begin to compare with the incendiary attraction between Close and Michael Douglas? Pushing even further, the last notable theatrical release to receive an NC-17 rating was 2013's *Blue Is the Warmest Color.* Scenes of graphic unsimulated sex, such as those in *Anatomy of Hell* and *Nymphomaniac,* remain the territory of auteurs and international filmmakers who can leverage critical clout to get into festivals. Such releases sometimes make it to streaming platforms (for example, Gaspar Noé's *Love,* now on Netflix), but they aren't the cinephilic fodder they were just a decade ago.

As streaming platforms continue to dominate, new possibilities for adult content are emerging. Amazon's Jennifer Salke has partnered with Nicole Kidman to create a new house brand of "sexy date night" movies for Prime members. We have to consider that one of most plausible explanations for the cinematic-sex decline is the increase in sex on television. Should you ask your friends about their favorite recent depictions of sex, I imagine most will reference the small screen. Sex has made shows such as *Vida, Outlander, Euphoria* and *Pose* must-see television. The discourse around TV's steamiest moments—from bold thirst tweets to erotic GIFs—feels more pervasive than any cultural conversation about sex in film.

If we're living in the era of peak TV, shouldn't that suggest peak TV sex? Despite the earlier examples, not quite. Since 2000, sex scenes on television have tripled—to 0.06 percent. From 2010 to 2019, the percentage of movies with sex scenes was 20 times that of TV shows, at a time when television production outpaced film production by a ratio of about 13 to one. If we look back to the 1990s, the so-called peak decade for movie sex, data show that sex in film outpaced sex on TV by a staggering rate of about 60 to one.

While there may be more sex on TV today compared with 2000, the halcyon days of XXX late-night programming have come to an end. In 2018, HBO pulled *Cathouse, Real Sex* and other adult programming from its broadcast and streaming services. This summer, the world lost erotic pioneer Patricia Louisianna Knop, who, along with her life and business partner, Zalman King, produced a carousel of pay-cable carnality throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Together they created the lushest sexual-fantasy films to hit the mainstream, including *9½ Weeks, Two Moon Junction* and *Wild Orchid,* plus *Red Shoe Diaries,* which premiered on Showtime in 1992.

Red Shoe Diaries focused on the complexities of desire in a patriarchal, post-AIDS world. Bounty hunters, architects and doctors narrated their own stories of "love, passion, and betrayal" in letters sent to Red Shoes (played by David Duchovny), a wounded lothario who gets his kicks from their lurid tales. To kids of the 1990s, *Red Shoe Diaries* evokes sexy, synthwave role-play scenarios sponsored by Spencer's Gifts. But I would argue it had more progressive, thoughtful explorations of passion in its first season than in any premium-cable series since. It wasn't surprising, then, when I learned the show was produced in part by women, as was *Real Sex.* In the quarter-century since Knop and King's series debuted, we haven't come far in our depictions of non-heterosexual, non-vanilla sex in popular entertainment—or, more specifically, popular entertainment that isn't pornography.

To deny the essential role of sex in cinema is to deny a core truth.

I will admit cinematic sex satisfied my voyeurism only until I discovered the work of adult maven Joanna Angel, a former sex-advice columnist for *Spin.* Angel's brand of alt-porn features goth babes of all sizes along with approachable hunks such as Tommy Pistol. Through her Burning Angel banner, I realized that porn could be much more than vapid nymphets and hung studs, especially with a woman in the director's chair. Porn has always occupied a different part of my imagination than movie sex; the adult industry has its own celebrities, awards circuit and cinematic language that is both reflective of and totally unlike Hollywood. Equating the two industries undermines the talented performers in both worlds.

Hollywood's influence, and its current failure to present diverse perspectives on pleasure, is apparent on Adult Time, a paid subscription streaming service that bills itself as the Netflix of porn. Featuring more than 100 curated channels and 50,000 videos, Adult Time is the brainchild of Bree Mills, a queer female pornographer whose work includes everything from a lesbian-themed *Miami Vice* homage to a trans reimagining of *Thelma & Louise* to a kinky parody of the musical *Annie.*

Signing up for a trial of Adult Time this spring was the most revelatory experience I've had with porn since discovering Burning Angel. There, I watched real bodies—bodies with acne, cellulite and stretch marks; bodies historically valued

as less than desirable in mainstream storytelling of all kinds; bodies denied on-screen pleasure in Hollywood as well as adult films—experiencing real bliss. Scouring Adult Time's library, which includes thousands of scenes from porn's golden age, it's apparent there are more inclusive, feminine gazes in adult content than ever before. You just have to be willing to look beyond Pornhub.

More than half the nominees for best director at the 2019 XBIZ Awards were women, which represents far more gender diversity than any directing category during major awards season. Since the 1990s peak of cinematic sex, porn made for, by and about women (and trans, nonbinary and other gender-nonconforming folks) has unquestionably improved and diversified. This was long overdue, and I wouldn't trade porn's progress for better Hollywood-produced erotica, but mainstream filmmakers could learn how to frame, block and light cinematic sex scenes from Adult Time.

Depending on whom you ask, valuations of the global adult industry range from $5 billion to $97 billion. Pornhub reported 33.5 billion global visits in 2018; if we compare this to 2018's global box office returns of $41.7 billion (assuming the average movie ticket costs $10), we can estimate that about 4 billion movie tickets were sold in the same time frame. Adult industry aggregator MindGeek (which owns Pornhub, Redtube and YouPorn, among other sites) is currently mining millions of data points from users to craft new content by algorithm, just as Netflix did with *Maniac* and *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. Whether this optimized adult content resonates with viewers is yet to be seen, but for me, returning to the Wild West of free pornography after my Adult Time trial felt like eating Vienna sausage after two weeks of bingeing Wagyu beef.

Innovations in the adult industry have also created new technological concerns for any performer who appears nude or simulates sex. A Pandora's box of deepfake videos and other nascent forms of digital manipulation popped open around 2017 and immediately became popular as a way to reimagine adult content. On Pornhub, a search for "deepfakes" yields no results, but on Redtube and YouPorn, a dozen videos, each buried deep within the uncanny valley, surface. They became harder to watch with each frame, but one clip in particular, starring a superheroine, shook me to my core. If I didn't know better, it would be difficult to believe it was fake.

For now, the celebrity deepfake market seems focused on exploiting women. When I searched through one such site, not a single video starred a male actor. Female nudity in film has plummeted since its peak of appearing in about six percent of all films in the 1990s to less than three percent of all films in the past 20 years. This still eclipses male nudity, rarely full-frontal, which appears in only 1.67 percent of all films since 1950. The imbalance of gendered nude scenes was promoted in DeepNude, an app launched last summer that virtually undressed women using neural network technology from online nude photos. While DeepNude was taken down within a day, and measures such as California's proposed SB 564 (backed by the Screen Actors Guild) could prohibit the creation and sharing of digitally rendered sex scenes without the performers' consent, no single federal law protects against deepfake pornography.

The war over how our most intimate moments are digitally disseminated will be waged in our lifetime, with private citizens soon to face the same concerns as celebrities when it comes to how they're represented online. In the meantime, Hollywood has responded to performers' concerns about filming sex scenes with the creation of a new crew position: the intimacy coordinator. Just as stunt coordinators ensure that a balletic action sequence won't injure actors, an intimacy coordinator ensures that actors feel safe and comfortable while filming intimate scenes.

Alicia Rodis, co-founder of Intimacy Directors International, is currently working with SAG-AFTRA to create guidelines for shooting sex scenes while overseeing the sets of shows like *The Deuce*. *Euphoria*'s intimacy coordinator, Amanda Blumenthal, no doubt had a hand in creating the scene between Ferreira and Abrams that had me scouring Tumblr like it was 2007. With the of-age actors playing high school juniors, the scene could have read as exploitative or gratuitous. Instead—thanks to Blumenthal's presence, I imagine—their coupling felt raw and relatable. It thrilled me on a visceral level.

When I was the age of Ferreira's character on *Euphoria,* I was terrified someone would find out about my film-sex fascination. I didn't want to be the stereotypical hypersexual fat woman, who'd been revealed to me in films like *Road Trip* as the only option for my sexuality. As I've grown more comfortable with my sexuality (and seen it reflected in *Shrill, My Mad Fat Diary* and other media), I feel grateful for my early erotic adventures across the cinematic canon. Through all sorts of viewing I learned to appreciate every subtle gesture of affection between two actors pretending to be in love, and I came to crave the tactile, electrifying intimacy captured by films such as *The Piano* and *Morvern Callar*.

The feelings-first fervor from my adolescence never fully dissipated. I still seek sex scenes that challenge what I think I want from romance, especially as my own sexual spectrum continues to expand. Hollywood may be failing when it comes to depicting the many facets of contemporary sexuality, but we have also moved beyond the regressive sexual politics of *Manhattan* and *Disclosure* (think *Tangerine, The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*). As more women step behind the camera, we could soon see sex scenes from radical new perspectives that will shift how we think about sex at the movies forever—as long as Hollywood is willing to showcase them.

When we talk about diverse and inclusive storytelling, it must include depictions of our sexual lives and desires. To deny the essential role of sex in cinema is to deny a core truth about why we watch in the first place: desire. Desire to live a more thrilling life. Desire to experience something that fascinates us but is too frightening to touch in the real world. Whether we admit it or not, this is what keeps us coming back to the cinema. Great sex scenes project the secret, unspoken desires hiding in a viewer's heart onto a screen in front of them. Sex at the cinema has taught me more about my own desires than I could ever have imagined. I can't wait to be surprised and shocked by the next era.

Opposite page: Laura Berger, *Flower,* 2019. Acrylic on canvas.




PLAYBOY
PLAYBOY
PLAYBOY
PLAYBOY

ONCE A PLAYMATE, ALWAYS A PLAYMATE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
NADIA LEE COHEN

In 2020, the notion of sex positivity has found new enthusiasm among young women who believe true bodily autonomy means having the right to enjoy and participate in what was once written off as objectification. The present-day pinup is less concerned with how she appears before the male gaze than how she feels about herself. She no longer needs photographers and publications; she can direct her own shoots and post them on Instagram. Her modeling may be a rewarding hobby or a means of amassing an empire.

This raises a question: What does this mean for PLAYBOY and its most famous franchise?

"Once a Playmate, always a Playmate" goes the motto of the nearly 800 women who have held the title. But what is a Playmate anyway? Who is she? And who has she been all along?

Not to be confused with Playboy Bunnies (for more on the Playboy Club staffers, turn to page 209) or other women who've posed for the magazine, the honorific is short for Playmate of the Month, the designation bestowed on those who appear in the magazine's preeminent pictorial. It debuted in PLAYBOY's first issue—as "Sweetheart of the Month"—in 1953 and featured a 23-year-old Marilyn Monroe on red velvet, her perky breasts jutting out and her hips twisted to obscure her pubic area. Then came the *Data Sheet,* which in the past listed Playmates' "turn-ons," "turnoffs" and measurements—the last, I suppose, in case fans wanted to make them a fancy dress.

Depending on the eye of the beholder, these women were/are either unwitting agents of patriarchy, selling their bodies for fame and fortune (and the adoration of the men typically necessary for securing those things), or liberated trailblazers in ways some members of their gender could never imagine. Describing their origin, this magazine's founder said, "The innovation of our Playmate pictorials was to humanize the pinup concept."

But why should pinups require humanizing in the first place? Is it because men, the intended market for these images, don't typically see hot naked chicks as anything

BY
JAMILAH LEMIEUX

but a sum of measurements? Or was it a matter of removing women from pinup settings to make the fantasy more real?

Playmate pictorials have exhibited everything from camp to romance to self-awareness, sometimes all together. The shoots found women romping in mansions or on beaches or draped on top of fancy cars. Playmates always seemed to be winking at the camera, literally and figuratively, and delighting in their nakedness. Can you really take issue with pretty pictures of happy girls having fun? Is it really objectification if the object in question appears so deeply satisfied? Even objectification must be viewed, well, objectively. Yes, many men have enjoyed reducing us women to sexual fantasies or subjecting us to brief, lusty glares, but those men can't parlay fantasies and glares into fame and fortune, can they?







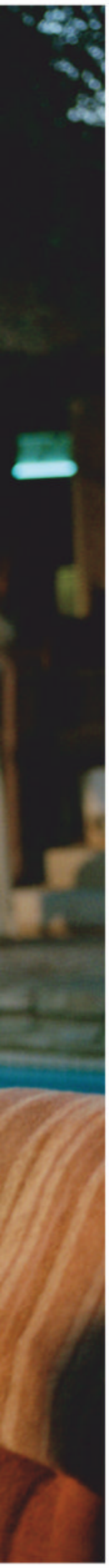


Throughout history, Playmates have also come to represent a *type* of beauty. Personally, I took little interest in the superstar models of the 1990s, during my childhood. Their bodies were not the ones I thought of while staring at my pudgy 13-year-old body in the mirror before vomiting whatever I'd eaten last, and they were not top of mind when I started working out a decade later. I did love Anna Nicole Smith, though, and I've always found the relative autonomy Playmates enjoy to be enviable. Imagine having not just a physique so universally accepted you could bare it on the pages of this magazine but the courage to do so—and be paid to do so! There's something fascinating about the gamble of a woman who could have accessed the relative protection and spoils of beauty elsewhere. It's a gamble that might have catapulted her into her dreams or cost her everything—just for daring to be *that* kind of sexual.

Alas, *sexy* is more complicated than *beautiful* and historically causes division among feminists. Some still consider sex work, stripping and pinup modeling to be irredeemable and misogynistic, positing that the male gaze is inextricable from these institutions even if they are women-owned. Others feel the ability for us to exist in those spaces is essential—or, at the very least, a necessary option.

To be allowed a space to identify as beautiful without rebuttal from your community and popular culture is a civil right granted to only a small percentage of people in this country. So when it comes to beauty standards, we must do more to expand than





destroy. Instead of dismissing the "girl next door" as antiquated, the most progressive of us must reshape norms to include all complexions, all ages, all sexual identities and all body types.

That's why *this* shoot is so important. We see these Playmates under two scopes: as a response to the progressiveness that demands evolution but also as godmothers to the autonomous and diverse pinups of today. One could make the case that without women like Victoria Valentino (September 1963 Playmate), Candace Collins Jordan (December 1979 Playmate), Reneé Tenison (November 1989 Playmate and first African American Playmate of the Year, in 1990), Brande Roderick (April 2000 Playmate and 2001 PMOY) and Raquel Pomplun (April 2012 Playmate and the first Mexican American PMOY, in 2013) we might not have autonomous bodies—whether tattooed, stretch-marked, pierced and/or postpartum—filling Instagram feeds.

These Playmates remind us that all bodies are worthy of public reverence, but Valentino, at the age of 77, makes the point most compellingly. Valentino's presence is powerful because in 2014 she came forward after more than 40 years of silence to allege sexual abuse against Bill Cosby. "Why did they wait so long?" is a constant challenge to the 60-plus Cosby accusers. Women who've put their sexuality on display struggle to be recognized as legitimate victims of sexual violence. But Valentino expresses gratitude for having been "given this platform so I might use my voice for social good." She's a different sort of beautiful, perhaps more alluring than the average pert 20-something could hope to be.

Once a Playmate, always a Playmate.

That motto could variously refer to these models' sisterhood or their fans' adoration, which continues long after newsstand dates. Inadvertently, it also brings to mind how a woman's past is always considered, regardless of her present. Many Playmates have achieved mainstream success all the same. Valentino is a women's rights activist, Jordan is a columnist, Tenison owns two clothing stores, Roderick is a Realtor and Pomplun is a comedian.











"I feel sexier in my 40s than I did in my 20s," Roderick says, "and I worry about the young women who think they can't be powerful if nudity is involved." For Pomplun, that's why this shoot represents "a rebellion in the face of criticism and judgment." Adds Jordan, "I want to show women that beauty and sexuality have no limits."

Women publicly taking pleasure in their bodies and sexuality is still a radical act, and it becomes more radical as we age. By returning to the pages of PLAYBOY, these women do more than prove they've "still got it." Perhaps here is where they truly "humanize" the pinup, reminding the world that our beauty doesn't fade with the years; it simply changes shape. Our sexuality does not deplete with age; it evolves.

We've made it to a time when a richer experience of womanhood has found its place in a world once built on youth and the perceived absence of physical flaws. There may not be a consensus over what that means, but it certainly feels like progress.









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Diamond Days

Previous page: *The first Playboy Club opened in Chicago in 1960, introducing to the world the boldness of the Bunny.* ***This page:*** *Budapest-born Marika Lukacs at the Chicago club.* ***Opposite page:*** *Announcing the musical entertainment at the Detroit club, which opened in December 1963.*

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the iconic Playboy Bunny, we asked more than a dozen Bunnies—and one Rabbit—to take a hop with us down memory lane

On February 29, 1960 the first Playboy Club opened its doors, and into pop culture bounded the Bunny. With her satin ears, sheer stockings, boned corset and white tail (the cuffs and collars came later), she has resided in our collective imagination ever since. Like the indelible Playboy Rabbit Head, the Bunny symbolizes the ideal of sophisticated pleasure. But unlike the inanimate logo, the Bunnies had the hard work of actually bringing that ideal to life.

It was a good job—if you could get it. Hundreds of Bunny hopefuls typically applied at each new club, some company-owned and others franchise-operated. Bunnies could be found working in 25 states and seven countries and, after Playboy's private DC-9 airplane took off in the early 1970s, in the sky as well. From Jamaica to New Jersey, London to Lansing and Omaha to Osaka, the Playboy hotels, casinos and resorts offered endless amenities and activities—horseback riding, scuba diving, skeet shooting, skiing, roulette. The bushy-tailed Bunny was the ever-present standard bearer (and still is: Visit our Playboy Club in London).

Bunny training was rigorous, and standards were high. The so-called Bunny Mothers were managers who enforced rules laid out in the intimidatingly thick Bunny Manual, but for the Bunnies, tips and other perks including tuition assistance and appearance fees made the difficult job worthwhile. In the early 1980s, for example, Bunnies hired to appear at events approved by Playboy earned $17.50 an hour—more than five times the minimum wage.

The clubs were showplaces for comedians, jazz musicians and other performers, but it was the Bunnies, with their practiced-to-perfection perch, stance and dip, who were the steady draw. For a short while in the mid-1980s, Rabbits—male servers who were Bunny counterparts—had their time in the New York hutch; more than 1,500 men applied for 25 positions.

It would be a mistake to look at the Bunny and see only a waitress; she was so much more. When the Bunny first arrived on the scene 60 years ago, the world was still adjusting to the idea of women who unapologetically owned their attractiveness or leveraged it as part of their job. Criticism came from various corners, including undercover Bunny Gloria Steinem's two-part 1963 story in *Show* magazine. But where some saw sexism, most Bunnies saw opportunity. (As one told *The New York Times* in 1976, "We're exploiting men; they're not exploiting us. After all, those poor slobs just want to come in here and see us.") Many former Bunnies credit their time working at the clubs as formative to the women they became.

"I really owe my Ph.D.—my first one—to Hugh Hefner and Playboy," says Elisabeth Clark, a psychologist and psychoanalyst who was known in the original New York club as Bunny Dana. "Playboy paid for two college courses every semester. My graduate-level classes at New York University were in the daytime, and I could still work at night. It was perfect."

Then as now, it took guts and grit to be a Bunny.

On the occasion of the Bunny's diamond anniversary, we reached out to 17 former Bunnies and one Rabbit—among their ranks a doctor, two rock singers, a film editor, an attorney and a social worker—and asked them about their time wearing the ears. Read on for their memories.

BUILDING CHARACTER—AND BANK ACCOUNTS

Offering excellent pay, flexible hours and tuition aid, working as a Bunny was often seen as the best gig in town

Gloria Hendry, New York club, 1965–1972 *(actor, singer, model, legal secretary):* I became a Bunny because of the money. Sometimes I made up to $2,000 a week. I was dabbling in acting, and I could never have afforded classes if I hadn't been a Bunny. Thanks to the hours, I was able to go out on auditions, and I got my first Screen Actors Guild movie role, in *For Love of Ivy,* with Sidney Poitier and Abbey Lincoln.

Sabrina Scharf Schiller, New York and Bahamas clubs, 1962–1963 *(attorney):* I thought if I worked very hard and saved diligently, it would give me the serious start I needed for my education. And that's exactly what happened. I



There was a total **shift** in social mores, and **Bunnies** were on the **front lines** of that change.

worked the first 60 days for the club without a day off, in three-inch heels, often doing double shifts. With tips, I was taking home the unheard-of amount of $100 per day. Mid-level career men weren't earning that much then, let alone young women.

Marilyn Cole, London club, 1971–1974 *(journalist, 1973 Playmate of the Year):* Playboy made us financially independent, a rare thing for 21-year-old girls. We could travel, buy our own cocktails and the latest fashions—even have mortgages and build our own lives. That was powerful.

Kathryn Leigh Scott, New York club, 1963–1966 *(actor, author—we're partial to her 1998 book, The Bunny Years):* I was a scholarship student at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, working at Bloomingdale's part time, when I saw the ad: "Girls, step into the spotlight, become a Playboy Bunny!" It sounded like fun, glamor, good pay and perfect hours for my class schedule. Lauren Hutton and I met in the long line to audition, and Keith Hefner hired both of us.

Debbie Harry, New York club, 1968 *(lead singer and songwriter for Blondie):* It's not a job or career choice for everyone; however, it was a good education for me, and the Playboy clubs always had a high regard for the women who worked there. Being a Bunny was the right decision for me, as I have always liked the naughty and nice sides of a story.

AT THE VANGUARD

As the sexual revolution got under way in the 1960s, influenced in no small part by PLAYBOY*, other social changes were transforming the cultural landscape*

Sabrina Scharf Schiller: Women's lives were changing drastically. The advent of the pill brought about more control over our bodies and our choices. There was a total shift in social mores, and Bunnies were on the front lines of that change. We were the innocent representation of the concept that sex is fun. Only the appearance was naughty.

Angelyn Chester, Chicago club, 1972–1984 *(journalist, 1974 International Bunny of the Year):* The very first woman who won International Bunny of the Year, Gina Byrams, was a woman of color. You have to remember the times; race relations were strained. In 1974 I won my local Bunny competition, and some people said, "Just go to L.A. and have a good time. They're not going to pick a woman of color after another woman of color." I didn't believe that. I thought I had just as good a chance as anybody. And I went on to win.

Jennifer Jackson, Chicago club, 1964 *(social worker, March 1965 Playmate):* The 1960s were an amazing period, you know? The Black Movement, Vietnam, the hippies, the Beatles, Motown. There hasn't been a more exciting time since.

Francesca Emerson, New York and Los Angeles clubs, 1963–1968 *(film editor):* The Playboy Club was known for hiring minorities even in the early 1960s, when some places were still segregated. I was a black unmarried mother living in New York City, and Playboy gave me confidence, independence, financial security, adventure and opportunities that would never have come to me had I still been working the counters at Bloomingdale's or serving coffee and donuts in some uptown takeout joint.

Gloria Hendry: The club was wonderful. If somebody grabbed my tail or said something derogatory to me, like "I don't want that black Bunny waiting on me," the room director would walk over and say, "May I have your Playboy key, please? Now get out and never come back." What can I say? They protected us, they took care of us, and that's my experience.

GETTING THE GIG

Every Bunny—or Rabbit—forged their own path to the Playboy Club

Gwen Wong Wayne, Los Angeles club and *Big Bunny* airplane, 1965–1975 *(interior designer, April 1967 Playmate):* My aunt was a Bunny in Miami and New York, and she had some great stories to tell; I think she was the catalyst for my career with Playboy. I showed some pictures to Keith Hefner, and he immediately asked if I could work at the Miami club. I couldn't leave my two children, but Keith promised that when the L.A. club opened I would be one of the first to get a Bunny suit. When the club was interviewing hundreds of girls, I thought Keith had probably forgotten me. He had not. He was a man of his word, and I was in—yeah! Later I became a Jet Bunny on Playboy's plane.

Connie Mason Kasten, Miami and Chicago clubs, 1961–1962 *(actor, June 1963 Playmate):*





Right: *Jet Bunnies take time off from their flight attendant duties on the Big Bunny to enjoy the sights in Venice, Italy in 1970.* ***Below:*** *Front Desk Bunnies at the Detroit club update the welcome board.*

It was a much coveted job, like being chosen to be in the Miss America pageant. Tony Roma had suggested to my dad that I apply since the Bunnies made such good tips. During my Bunny-hopping years I gained tremendous self-confidence, and I was able to support my two little ones as a single mother.

Jeff Rector, New York Empire Club, 1985–1986 *(actor, writer):* When word went out that Playboy was looking for waiters, every Chippendale thought he would get the job. But Playboy didn't want a bunch of beefcakes who just strolled around looking pretty. You had to do your job and do it well. It's the only job I've ever had where I couldn't wait to go to work.

Dale Bozzio, Boston club, 1973–1976 *(musician, lead singer for Missing Persons):* I was 18 years old when I became a Playboy Bunny in Boston. Out of 250 girls, they hired four, and I was one of them. Training lasted weeks. I learned how to use my beauty in a kind, precious manner. I became the best Bunny I possibly could.

BARRACUDAS AND TOUGH MOTHERS

The Bunny gig came with some exacting standards (sometimes too exacting) and demanding tasks

Angelyn Chester: It was not a hairnet type of job. We had weeks of grueling training. You had to learn how to high-carry a tray with two heavy telephone books and how to carry the tray at your waist. You had to be strong to high-carry, to walk in those heels, to serve. And you had to be fast. Once I got my tray, it was like a badge of honor. You got your tray, your flashlight and your name tag. It was like a flight attendant getting her wings.

Pat Lacey, Los Angeles and Jamaica clubs and *Big Bunny,* 1965–1978 *(Playboy Promotions specialist, writer):* We did a weigh-in every month; you had to stay within five pounds of your original weight. Being a Bunny was a workout: You developed strong arms from all the lifting and Bunny-dipping. The night manager called us experienced Bunnies barracudas because you had to be tough to make it. When I was a Bunny Mother and we needed five girls, we'd get 10 to start. Not all of them would make it. Girls would get demerits for lateness, for shoes that weren't polished. But they were smart and knew how to get by my inspections.

Sabrina Scharf Schiller: I did not like the weekly weigh-in to ensure a trim Bunny figure was kept under control. Those costumes were tight, and we knew when we'd had one dessert too many.



IN THE WARREN

Myriad positions were available at the clubs: Door Bunnies, Floor Bunnies, Pool Bunnies, Cabaret Bunnies and more

Sharron Long, Kansas City and Jamaica clubs, 1966–1968 *(businesswoman):* I took over the pool table shortly after starting. It was perfect for me. I loved it, and it taught me a lot about being an entrepreneur, though I wasn't aware of it at the time. I learned how to take chances, how to trust my judgment and, most important, how to step out of the mold that had been created for women at that time.

Joyce Nizzari, Chicago, Miami and New Orleans clubs, 1960 *(Playboy Mansion executive assistant, December 1958 Playmate):* I worked at the original Chicago club during the first week it opened as a Door Bunny, checking key numbers. I wore the Bunny







Our Strong Suit

Recognized the world over, the Bunny costume may be the most famous uniform ever created

Like many aspects of Playboy history, the Bunny suit owes much of its success to women—and not just those who wear it.

Founder Hugh Hefner originally wanted silky negligees as the club uniform but was talked out of the impractical idea by Victor Lownes, the promotions manager who was instrumental in the development of the clubs. Instead Lownes brought Hef a better idea—one Lownes got from his girlfriend, actress Ilsa Taurins (whose name is spelled variously as Ilze and Ilse). As former Bunny Kathryn Leigh Scott reports in *The Bunny Years*, Taurins suggested the costume be rabbit-based, a play on the magazine's emblem. Although Hefner had already considered and spurned the idea as too masculine, Taurins created a one-piece design with an attached tail and separate ears, according to Scott. Taurins's seamstress mother then assembled the prototype, which Lownes showed to Hef. The costume wasn't quite daring enough for Hefner's vision, but with minor alterations it formed the basis for the world-famous outfit that debuted at the Chicago Playboy Club in 1960.

Quality of craftsmanship in addition to the risk-taking fashion surely also helped the costume's legacy. According to New York University director of costume studies Nancy Deihl, the clubs commissioned talented women to custom-build the suits, including Zelda Wynn Valdes, who fabricated them for the New York club that opened in December 1962.

"The Bunny costume has withstood the test of time because of its simplicity," says Kristi Beck, a Playboy

costume with no collar or cuffs because they hadn't been added to the uniform yet. The lines to get in were so long that the doors were almost never fully closed; I remember getting snow on my costume.

Gloria Hendry: I wound up starting as a Cigarette Bunny, saying, "Cigars, cigarettes, Tiparillos, Playboy lighters? One dollar and five cents." I'll never forget those lines. And men used to come by and give me a $100 or $50 tip.

Pat Lacey: After six weeks of training in Indiana in an enormous hangar, and in Florida for water-evacuation training, and in Wisconsin at the Lake Geneva club, where the Playboy chef taught us how to prepare gourmet meals, I became a Jet Bunny. Normally a flight would have just one preflight FAA inspector. But on the *Big Bunny* there were always multiple inspectors—they wanted to see Hef's plane and the Jet Bunnies!

Carol Cleveland, London club, 1966 *(comedian, writer and Monty Python cast member):* I started off in the Cabaret Room. Once I took people's orders and the show started, I could watch the cabaret. Dave Allen was a well-known comedian here in England, and he was the star when I first started. I was a great fan and happy as could be watching him perform every night.

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE DRESSING ROOM

Co-workers became friends who became family within the special society of Bunnydom

Marilyn Cole: The Bunny room was the most liberating place—there was swearing, nudity, camaraderie and pluralism. I learned about politics, social justice and religious diversity. A Bunny roommate had been born in Aden as a Zoroastrian; she called it the oldest religion in the world. She would burn incense and pray every night, even wear a religious garment around her waist underneath her Bunny costume.

Kathryn Leigh Scott: I was a farm kid from the Midwest mixing with 110 other young women in every size and shape, from every religious, ethnic, cultural, economic and racial background, from all over the world. The Bunny dressing room circa 1963 was more diverse than a college campus even 20 years later. A single mother from a Harlem project donned the same jewel-colored costume as an heiress, an East German refugee who'd escaped the Berlin Wall, the daughter of a Chinese diplomat, a gap-toothed tomboy who became a supermodel; I interviewed them all for *The Bunny Years.*

Candace Collins Jordan, St. Louis and Chicago clubs, 1973–1977 *(columnist, December*

Opposite page, top left and right: *Each Bunny's garment is custom-fit to her needs by an experienced seamstress.* ***Opposite page, lower left:*** *Scottie Scott of the New Orleans club works as a Pool Bunny.* ***Below:*** *Cynthia Maddox models an early collarless, cuffless version of the Bunny suit (architectural model of the Chicago club in the background).*



senior manager and part of a group responsible for overseeing Bunny selection and training.

Small changes to the hare-raising getup have been made over the decades: the addition of the tuxedo collar and cuffs and a name-tag rosette, a tweak to the high-cut leg, a slight redesign of the ears, more accommodating cup sizes—but the Bunny remains as recognizable as ever.

By the time the suit turned 20, various versions were in use alongside the solid-color satin classic: suits with psychedelic patterns inspired by Emilio Pucci, a VIP suit in velvet, a lacy (and short-lived) cabaret version and a fur-trimmed green or red Christmas look. And not all Bunnies wore the famous suit; season, location and responsibility also dictated their attire, with non-corset-based outfits for Ski Bunnies, Croupier Bunnies, Beach Bunnies and others.

Today Playboy Club servers wear suits that were updated in 2005 with accessories by designer Roberto Cavalli. In 2018 Bunnies at the Coachella music fest wore a new green-leaf-patterned suit, but the original 1960 silhouette remains intact.

Since its appearance six decades ago, the Bunny suit has woven its way into the fabric of American culture, donned by everyone from Dolly Parton to Flip Wilson to Kate Moss. It was the first service uniform ever registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and a complete Bunny costume can be found in the collection of the Smithsonian. Like other cultural mainstays, how it's seen often depends on who's looking at it, including the Bunnies themselves.

"Bunnies like wearing it for different reasons," says Beck, who sometimes fits new Bunnies into their suits. "Some see it as playful and nostalgic; others see it as badass empowerment. We don't need to define it for them."





Opposite page: *At Playboy's Lake Geneva resort guests could partake in various seasonal activities, from skiing to swimming to horseback riding, with friendly assistance from Bunnies (Playmate and Bunny Gwen Wong Wayne at far right).* ***Right:*** *Sandy Lawrence at the New York club, circa 1963.*

1979 Playmate): The Bunnies were the sisters I never had. It was a unique sorority and a joy for me.

Francesca Emerson: We bonded like glue. Playboy was like a gigantic family of different people of different backgrounds and different cultures, all working hard to improve themselves. When we weren't working, we'd meet at each other's houses and have lunches and dinners together, participate in each other's kids' birthday parties, even take vacations together. Half a century later, I still have close friendships from the New York and L.A. clubs.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Donning the ears could come with some baggage

Marilyn Cole: I am shocked that I still sometimes have to defend myself for having been a Bunny and a Playmate. It was a woman who interviewed me. It was a woman who trained me. It was a woman who did PR at the club. PLAYBOY magazine's photo editor was a woman. The first woman gaming inspector in the U.K. casino industry had been a Playboy Croupier Bunny. I wish people knew that. Who would have thought we would have such an impact on social history? The Bunnies were pioneers. We stood for freedom.

Candace Collins Jordan: I wish people understood what a wonderful opportunity this was for women like me instead of thinking we were exploited. It was our choice to be Bunnies. We made great money and great friends and had wonderful opportunities that are now lasting memories. It was a priceless and life-changing experience for me and made me who I am today.

Jennifer Jackson: In the 1960s and 1970s, no one thought black people were pretty. And then people saw me as a black woman, and that black is beautiful, in all different shades. That was one of the things that we promoted.

Kathryn Leigh Scott: Former Bunnies include entrepreneurs, lawyers, judges, CEOs, professors, architects, restaurateurs, scientists and a few actors and writers—none of us turning in our satin ears to collect Social Security!

Angelyn Chester: Hefner sent a memo to corporate explaining that if it were not for the women, the Playmates and the Bunnies in particular, that the company would not exist, so they are to be respected and not harassed. He was ahead of his time when it came to policies like that.

GOOD TIMES, GREAT MEMORIES

From celebrity customers to softball stardom, the Bunnies and Rabbits led unforgettable lives

Pat Lacey: In Jamaica they had goat racing on the beach for guests to watch. Guys would climb the trees and grab fresh coconuts right off the palms. During the day, before six P.M., we wore a two-piece bikini, ears and tail, with flip-flops, and in the evenings the standard Bunny costume. I overstayed my visa and got booted from the country!

Elisabeth Clark, New York and Montreal clubs, 1965–1975 *(psychologist and psychoanalyst):* I was working the Playmate Bar one night, and this guy was at my station all by himself, wearing a hat and a raincoat. I took his order, scotch and water or something, and I served it to him. The bartender said, "Do you know who you're waiting on?" I said, "No, why?" And he says, "That's Paul Newman." I said, "Who's Paul Newman?"

Jeff Rector: Wherever we went, people were like, "Oh my God, it's the Bunnies and Rabbits from the Playboy Club." We could get into any club, anytime. We could get reservations at any restaurant. We really were treated like celebrities.

Francesca Emerson: Playing on the Bunny softball team is one of my favorite memories. It started as a charity event in the Chicago club and was so successful it spread throughout the clubs. The New York club's team was so competitive. Every Thursday at noon, the Dream Team, as we were known, played in Central Park; we wore black tights and orange sweaters with the Bunny logo on the front.

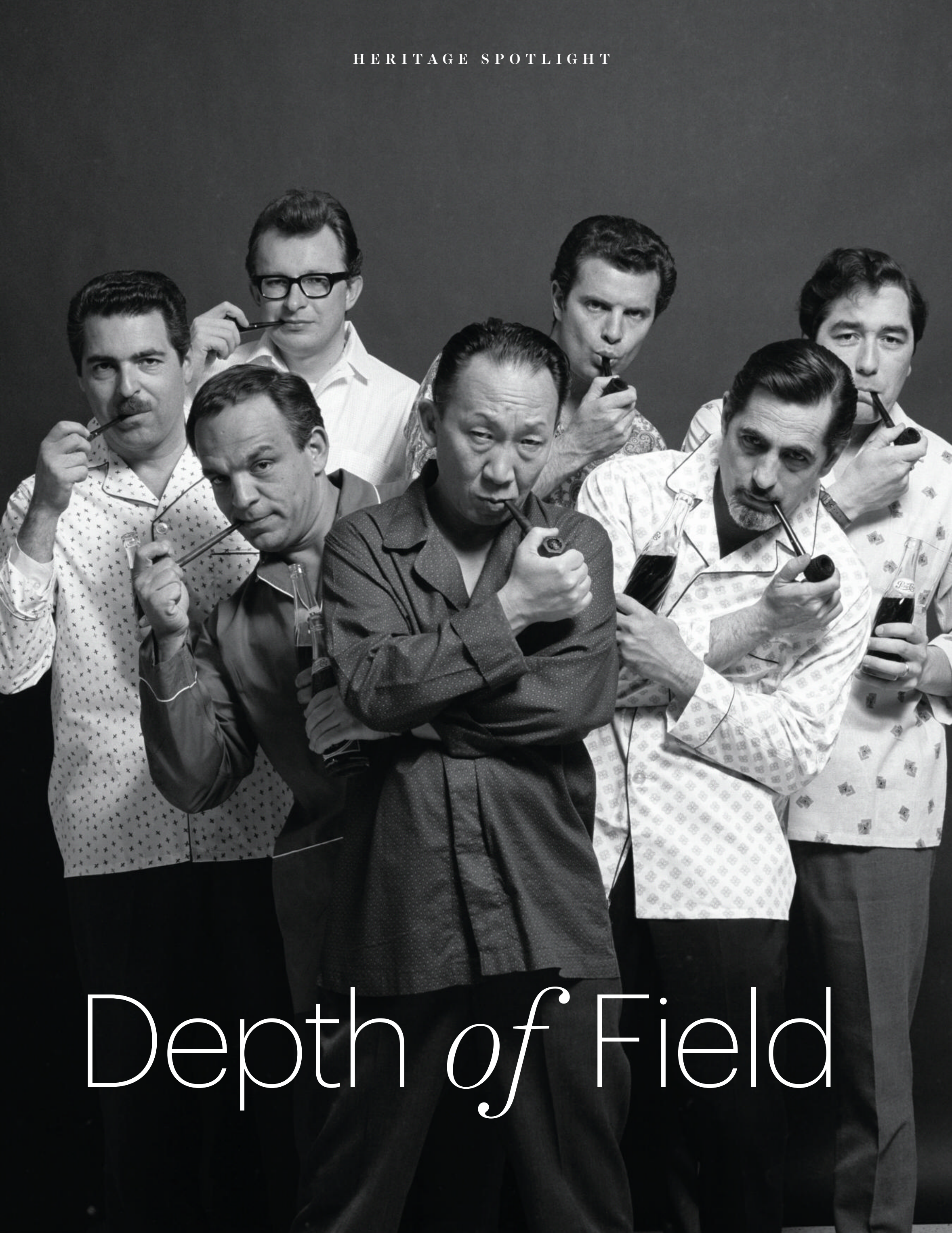
THE TAIL END

A parting thought from a beloved Bunny

Dale Bozzio: I'm the proudest Bunny. Everything I learned as a Playboy Bunny brought me to today. I'm 64 years old; I go on stage every month, maybe four times a month. I learned to be courageous and to be a proud woman and to know how beautiful I am. I learned to love myself. And that's where I'm coming from; that's how I write all my music. That's how I live my life, and that's how I've raised my sons.

Reporting by Tori Lynn Adams, Cat Auer, Andie Eisen and Michele Sleighel.

HERITAGE SPOTLIGHT



Depth *of* Field

We train our lens on the magazine's founding photo editor for some long overdue exposure

BY **CAT AUER**

Few jobs are as ready-made to inspire envy among lovers of women than that of PLAYBOY photo director. Yet little has been written about the magazine's founding "picture editor," Vincent T. Tajiri, who for 15 stratospheric years oversaw our photo department. During his tenure Tajiri watched the print run top 7 million, thanks in large part to the teeming photographer and stringer ecosystem he developed. Praised as a gentleman and a deep thinker by his former employees (and called a cocksucker by Hunter S. Thompson; more on that later), he remained an elusive figure among the many outsize personalities of PLAYBOY's early years. So who was Vince Tajiri?

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Born in southern California in 1919, Tajiri was a teenager when his older brother Larry, who went on to be a distinguished journalist, brought home a 35-mm SLR camera from a reporting trip to Asia. Vince, who'd been priming himself to be a writer, fell in love with the medium. "I knew very little about photography then," he told *Popular Photography* in 1968, "but I shot promiscuously and uninhibitedly." At the same time he was developing his photography skills, he wrote prolifically for English-language papers that served the Japanese American community.

At the age of 18 he moved to San Francisco to work for one such daily, *Nichibei Shinbun.* The previous year he had created Rigmarole, an intermittent *Nichibei* column that variously covered the nisei (Americans who, like Tajiri, were born to immigrant parents from Japan), sports stats, movies and any other topic that caught Tajiri's attention.

In February 1941 Tajiri was drafted into the Army. He was at Camp Bonneville in Washington state on December 7 of that year when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The next day the United States entered World War II, and less than three months later the government ordered nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast—the vast majority of them U.S.-born citizens—out of their homes and into incarceration camps. Among them were Tajiri's mother and younger siblings, who were sent to the camp in Poston, Arizona with only what they could carry. They lost everything else, including the home they owned in San Diego.

Tajiri was a sergeant in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team—the famed unit composed of nisei soldiers that became the military's most decorated—when he married his girlfriend, Rose Hayashi, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in August 1943, ahead of his expected deployment. Poor health ultimately kept Tajiri out of overseas duty. Three of his brothers volunteered to serve. One, who joined the Army out of Poston in 1943, was later awarded a Purple Heart.

The inequity between the Tajiris' service and the government's bigotry is almost too obvious to state, but Vince gave it eloquent expression in a September 1942 letter to the *Fresno Bee:* "Except for minor differences in pigment we are just like you." Not only did the Army have Japanese American officers, he reminded readers, but "another 16,000 are serving in the ranks.... America's battle is our battle, and America's enemies are our enemies."

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After the war, Vince and Rose moved to Chicago, where they started a family. Vince took on freelance photo assignments and soon enough was working concurrently as editorial director of three photo-based titles: *Guns Magazine, Art Photography* and *Figure Quarterly,* the first two of which were titles of Publishers' Development Corp. While at PDC, Tajiri met Hugh Hefner, who worked in the circulation department by day and, later, in his kitchen on his nascent magazine by night. Both *Art Photography* and *Figure Quarterly* featured pinup and nude photography, and it's likely Tajiri's experience with such material helped Hefner see him as an attractive recruit.

In 1956 Tajiri signed on to be PLAYBOY's first photo editor, making him Hefner's "third important hire," according to Hefner biographer Steven Watts—presumably after art director Art Paul, who designed the Rabbit Head, and A.C. Spectorsky, a key editor. Shel Silverstein, in his 1964 three-part history of PLAYBOY, wryly imagined Hef's hiring process: "Here's how it will be...Spec is the associate publisher, so he gets $700 a week... Vic is promotion director, so he gets $500 a week...John is production manager, so he gets $400 a week...and Tajiri, you'll be photographing the girls, so you pay *us* $100 a week!"

"When I arrived, the photo department was me, one file cabinet, a secretary and two desks," Tajiri once said. A decade later, he was managing a staff of dozens and a countrywide network of stringers. The photo facilities he developed at 919 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago included studio spaces, processing labs, a library and a full kitchen, where film was kept in the freezers. By 1968 the in-house lab was developing about 5,000 rolls of film on-site annually, with thousands more sent elsewhere.

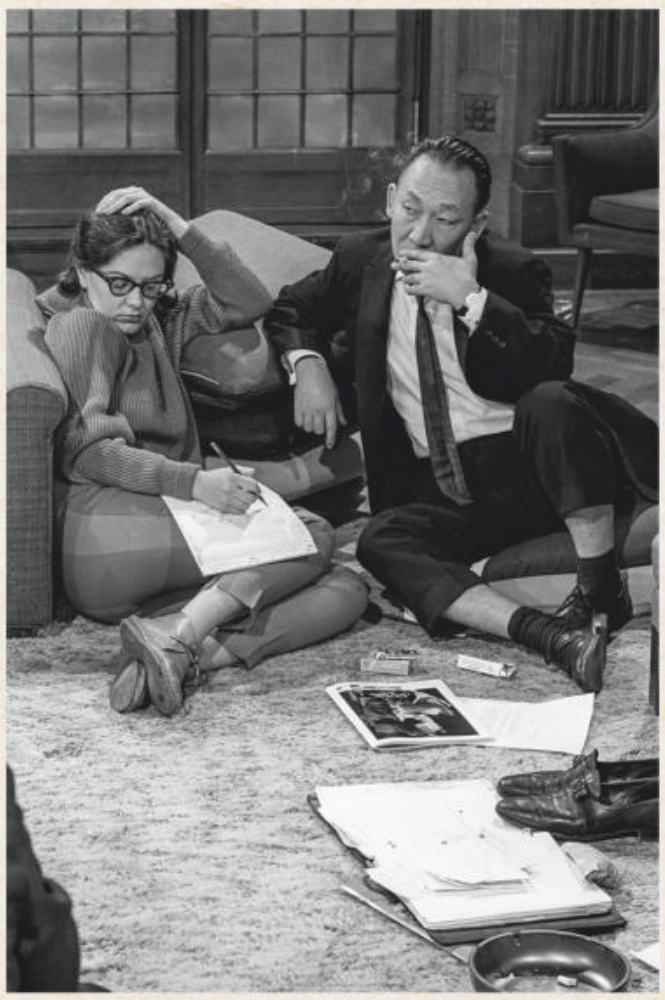
In addition to producing images for the magazine, Tajiri oversaw the photo needs of the clubs, which numbered more than a dozen by 1965, and supervised the photography in *VIP,* the club magazine. Playboy's many other departments often required original shoots, including for advertising and mail-order products, the Playboy Press and Playboy's modeling agency. Eventually Tajiri was responsible for Playboy's three full-time studios in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles.

Naturally Tajiri's influence went beyond the images: In 1959, Hefner wanted to run a black-and-white photo taken at a nude-dancing establishment. "There's pubic hair evident in the picture. It's more than a shadow," Tajiri told *Rolling Stone* in 1973. But Hefner didn't want to retouch it, instead printing it very small. Tajiri was nervous about running afoul of obscenity laws—this was four years before the city of Chicago took Hefner to court for publishing photos of a nude Jayne Mansfield—and so, in Tajiri's words, he "shaped up the triangle where it was a little ragged. Made it look like a G-string." Tajiri even created a fake contact sheet. When the FBI came to investigate, they closely inspected the doctored duplicates but found nothing amiss.

His role at the magazine afforded him proximity to celebrities, including Peter Sellers, with whom he played poker at



Opening page: *Tajiri and his staff photographers pose in a pajama-Pepsi-pipe tribute to Hefner, circa 1968, taken by Bill Arsenault. Clockwise from Tajiri: Mario Casilli, Pompeo Posar, Alexas Urba, Larry Gordon, J. Barry O'Rourke and Jerry Yulsman.* ***Above:*** *A June 1958 Playbill image of the dapper photo director.*



Above: *Tajiri and associate picture editor Bev Chamberlain at a 1962 magazine meeting in the original Playboy Mansion in Chicago.*

Playboy's London casino, and John Cassavetes, who became a good friend, according to Tajiri's daughter, Rea Tajiri, a filmmaker. But not all high-profile interactions were so warm. In 1969 Hunter S. Thompson was working on a PLAYBOY story about French ski champ Jean-Claude Killy and his promotional tour for Chevrolet. Thompson and a member of the Chevy PR team were out drinking in Chicago when Tajiri swung by to ask the flak to bring Killy to the Mansion that evening for a photo shoot. The invite did not extend to Thompson. "The cocksucker told me to get lost," Thompson groused after the magazine killed his article.

By the early 1970s, Tajiri had begun to doubt the direction the magazine was headed. *Penthouse,* a raunchy imitator, was gaining popularity and pushing PLAYBOY into new territory. Hefner decided to print a photo revealing a peek of Playmate pubic hair in the January 1971 issue.

"I was very, very unhappy about it. I felt we were chasing an upstart," Tajiri later told British writer Russell Miller. Hefner eventually agreed, saying the magazine had temporarily "lost [its] compass," but by then Tajiri had left the company. Back on the West Coast, he contributed technical discussions and commentary sections to books by photographic heavyweights including Annie Leibovitz, Mary Ellen Mark, Will McBride and Bert Stern. In 1977 he wrote a thorough and entertaining biography of silent-screen star Rudolph Valentino for Bantam Books.

Life in Los Angeles helped Tajiri reconnect with his roots. "It was kind of like a homecoming for him," says Rea Tajiri. "He started working more in the Japanese American community." Among other collaborative projects, Vince edited the 1990 publication *Through Innocent Eyes,* a compilation of art, poetry and essays created by children incarcerated at the Poston camp.

Despite running the photography department of a magazine renowned for its imagery, Tajiri's name is not as well known as Hefner's or Paul's. Some of his former employees attribute that relative obscurity to his quiet nature and indifference to the spotlight. His grandson Vince Schleitwiler, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Washington, sees cultural factors at play.

"The fact that he was kind of invisible but really influential is very much like a lot of other high-achieving Japanese Americans after the war—people who did really significant things in design and architecture, in the sciences and other professional fields," says Schleitwiler. "But they were not inclined to call attention to themselves, having experienced what having attention called to you was like."

Granddaughter Midori Tajiri, who lived in the Tajiri family house in L.A. in the late 1980s and early 1990s and is today a New Orleans artist, remembers how supportive Vince was of family and community. "He loved watching *In Living Color* because there was a Japanese hip-hop dancer. Every time they would come on, he would point her out," Midori says. "It was a big deal, because Japanese didn't always have a role in media and society when he was growing up."

Of course, it all comes back to the pictures. Tajiri died in 1993, but you can still glimpse his quiet brilliance on thousands of PLAYBOY pages—and in a remark he made to *Popular Photography* in 1968. "The most important thing in a photograph of a woman is her eyes," he said. "If a woman's eyes are not sharp, if they don't say anything, the picture doesn't run in PLAYBOY."

In the same interview, he also said, "Without photography, there would be no PLAYBOY." To which we might add—without Vince Tajiri, one can only wonder what PLAYBOY would have been.

Playboy's Rearview

Over 66 years and 761 issues, we've covered plenty of ground. From marijuana policy to Mideast mediation to feminist porn, here are a handful of contributions worth a second look

1950s





History unfolded in the March 1956 PLAYBOY with the three-page photo of nightie-clad Marian Stafford—the magazine's first literal Centerfold. Although Stafford captivates as a Playmate (below left), the talent behind the lens is equally notable: Ruth Sondak (left), who had been a World War II photojournalist. After the war Sondak became an agency photographer and later a freelancer, shooting portraits of such luminaries as Winston Churchill and Eleanor Roosevelt, among other assignments, across a decades-long career. Sondak's photos of antiwar protesters swarming the Pentagon in 1967 are perhaps her best known—excluding, of course, her pictorial of Stafford.

1960s

Frequent PLAYBOY contributor Alex Haley (below) phoned George Lincoln Rockwell, leader of the American Nazi Party, and asked him to sit for the April 1966 *Playboy Interview*. "After assuring himself that I wasn't Jewish, he guardedly agreed," Haley reported. "I didn't tell him I was a Negro." Upon Haley's arrival to the interview in Arlington, Virginia, Rockwell produced a pearl-handled revolver, displaying it on the arm of his chair. He needed it for protection from assassins, he insisted. Haley tolerated Rockwell's hostility with backbone and humor ("I've been called 'nigger' many times, Commander, but this is the first time I'm being *paid* for it," Haley said) to get his story—a fascinating and nearly 12,000-word conversation. Haley went on to pen the groundbreaking book *Roots* in 1976; Rockwell, it turns out, did need protection—an American Nazi shot him to death in 1967.



1970s

In January 1970, the *Dear Playboy* section was ablaze in reaction to the article that had sparked the PLAYBOY cover line A MEDICAL AUTHORITY CALLS FOR THE LEGALIZATION OF POT. Dr. Joel Fort had argued just that in *Pot: A Rational Approach,* setting in motion a deluge of letters from across the country. Reader response to the then controversial idea came from medical doctors, the assistant secretary of the Department of Health and even a former U.S. narcotics commissioner. Three members of the U.S. House of Representatives also wrote in—all supporting loosened drug laws. Fifty years later, most states allow some degree of usage, but marijuana remains illegal at the federal level.



DEAR PLAYBOY

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MELTING POT

The extent to which Dr. Fort has researched his subject is quite evident in *Pot: A Rational Approach* (PLAYBOY, October). While I cannot presently support Dr. Fort's view that the distribution and use of marijuana should be fully legalized, particularly in view of the inadequately documented long-term effects of the drug, I certainly share his conviction that existing Federal and state penalties for its possession are sorely in need of revision. I hope this will be accomplished in the present session of Congress.

Roger O. Egeberg, M. D.
Assistant Secretary for
Health and Scientific Affairs
Department of Health,
Education and Welfare
Washington, D. C.

I found Dr. Joel Fort's article to be most interesting and provocative. As a member of the House Select Committee on Crime, I can report that the Congress is acutely aware of the many contentions regarding marijuana effects, the laws against its use and the penalties provided by those laws. The chairman of the crime committee, Congressman Claude

Shrouded by uncertainties, it remains sinfully dangerous. We have suffered such logic for too long. If improvement in the law is necessary, it should come from the nation's legislatures. If there is a pressing need for objective scientific judgments concerning the harm and/or benefit of pot, then research toward that end should be undertaken as soon as possible and legislatures should begin to pave the way now. Our society should not be forced to wait upon the pondering proclivities of the national judiciary. Liberalized laws and creative research efforts are already too long overdue. There is recent evidence that Congress is on its way toward raising the marijuana smoke screen. The first giant step was taken in September, when a bipartisan group of 35 Congressmen, including myself, joined Representative Edward I. Koch in sponsoring legislation to establish a Presidential commission to consider pot's legal, medical and sociological aspects. If approved by both Houses, the commission would work to authoritatively establish how many Americans smoke marijuana, how effective the laws against it are, its personal and social effects, its relationship to crime and its possible role as a threshold to the use of other drugs. We make no pretensions about



1980s

Dick Gregory (left) is best known as a comedian—he got his big break at the Chicago Playboy Club in 1961—but he was also a committed activist, often using hunger strikes to draw attention to issues such as tribal rights, police brutality and apartheid. In 1980 he traveled to Iran, where the shah had recently been overthrown and 52 Americans had been captured, to "fast and pray for the safe resolution of the hostage crisis." Gregory, a convert to Islam, got an unexpected introduction to the Ayatollah Khomeini and even met with some of the revolutionaries who were holding the captives, presenting a three-stage plan under which he thought they could be freed. Nothing came of the proposal, but he walked away with an amazing tale he recounted in the December 1980 PLAYBOY feature *Inside Khomeini's Iran* (co-written with reporter Barbara Reynolds).

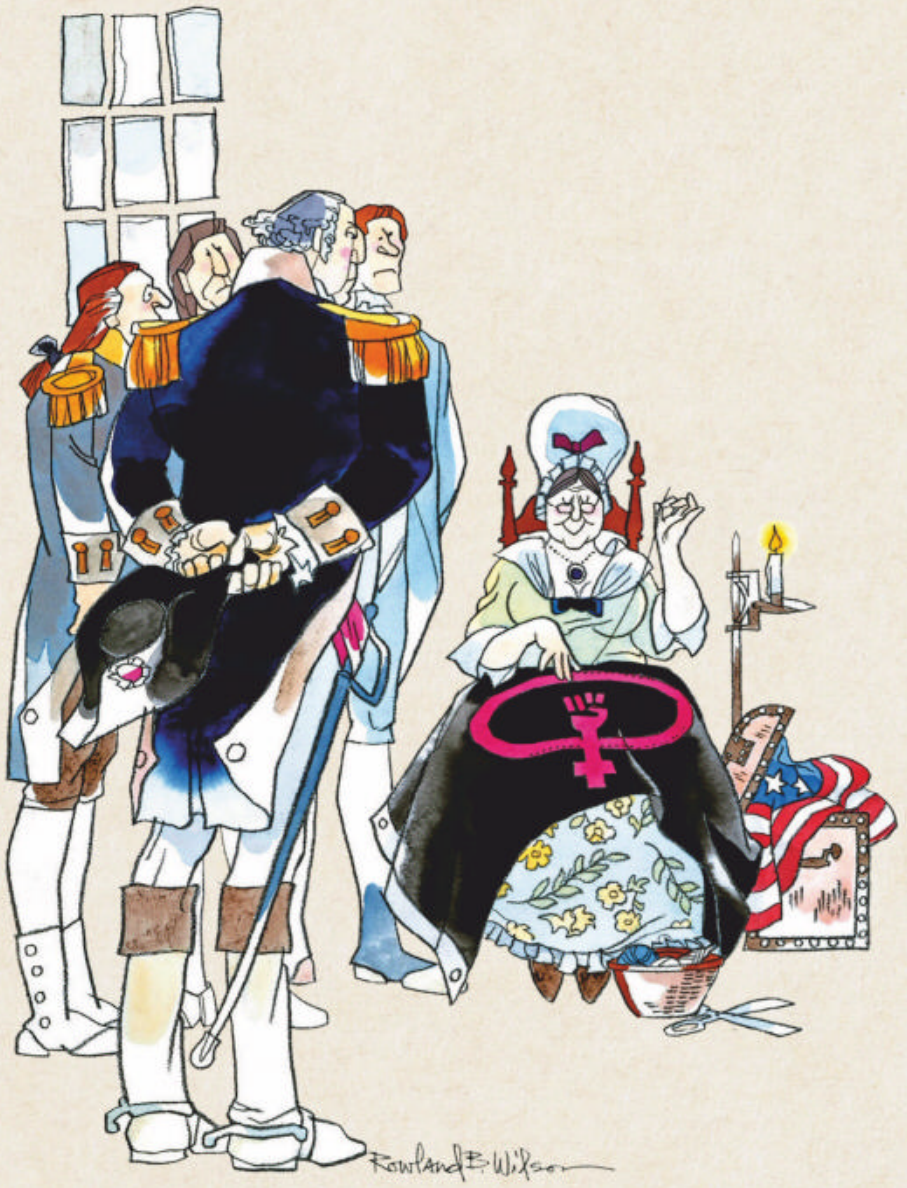
1990s



Porn and feminism are not mutually exclusive, argued Nadine Strossen in the February 1995 *Forum*. Strossen (left)—the youngest president and first female leader of the American Civil Liberties Union and author of *Defending Pornography*—discussed censorship, sexuality and more with assistant editor Dorothy Atcheson. "If my so-called equality doesn't include freedom of expression, how am I equal?" Strossen asked. "And, if freedom of expression doesn't include the right to talk about sex, to look at pornography, to pose for it, to perform in it, to defend it, how do I have free speech?" Strossen, who led the ACLU for 17 years, is now a New York Law School professor; her work paved the way for today's sex-positive feminists.

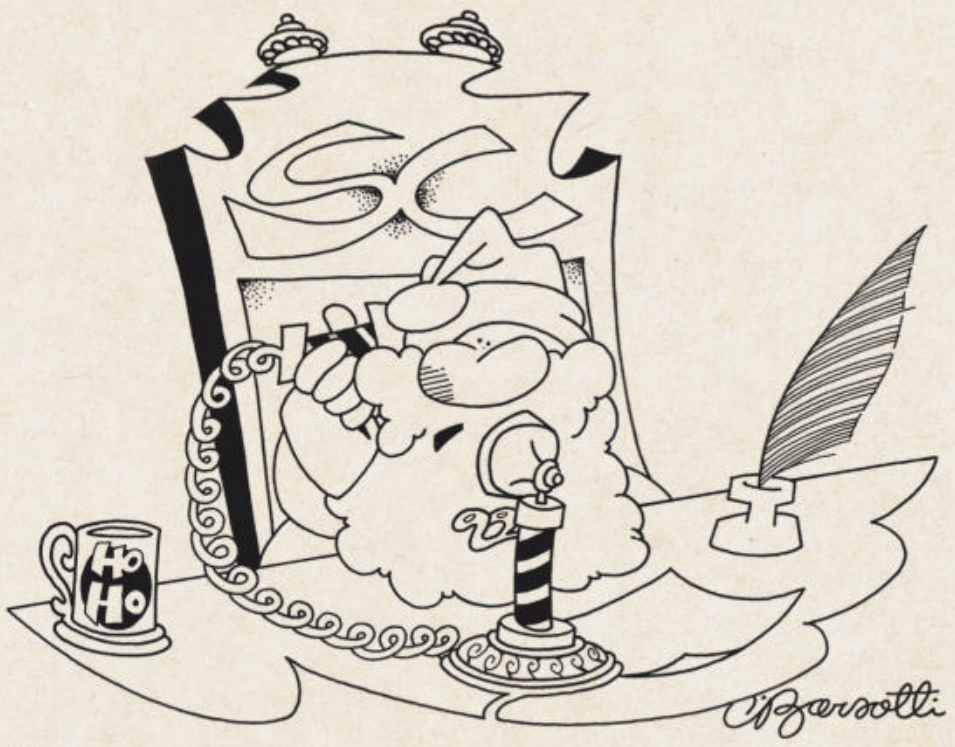
Explore these pieces and more at iPlayboy.com.

CLASSIC





"Just a minute, how come we're always looking for a white whale?"

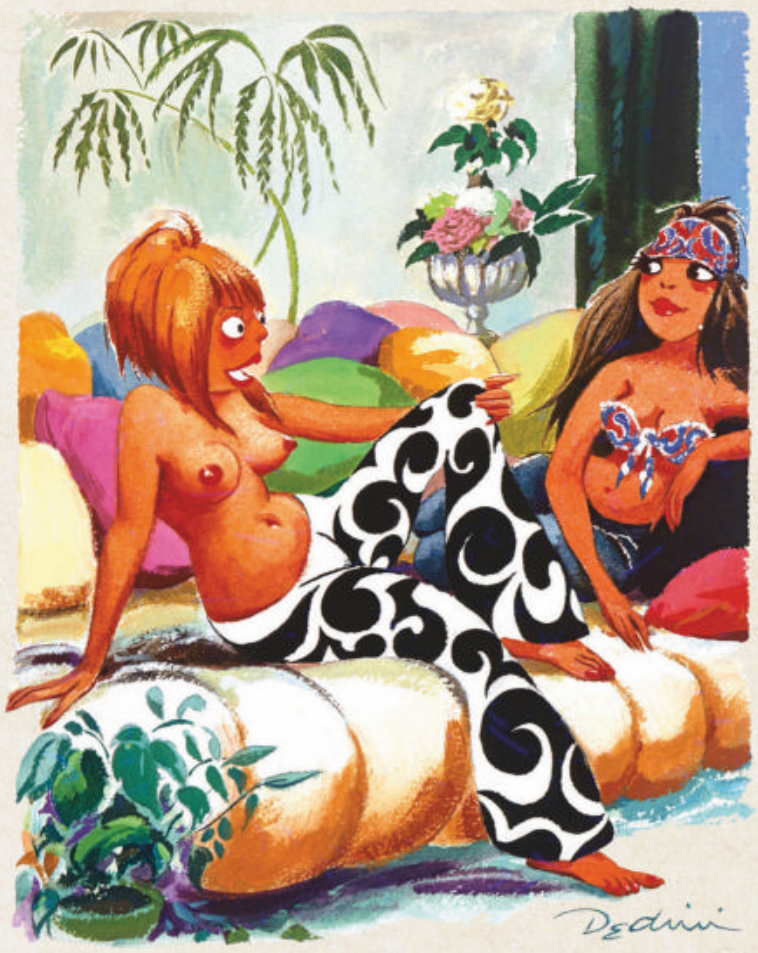


"You got it. I'm only visiting ERA states this year."



"Frankly, Brother Dominick, your case appears to be without precedent, but it is unlikely that you can remain a monk."

CARTOONS



"This year, I'm just giving fruitcake and vibrators."



"How about a little Germaine Greer for a change?"



"You should be making as much as the pope!"



"But I don't want to meet a tall dark man. How about a tall blonde woman?"



Anne Marie Fox

Our February 1982 Playmate on
conquering both sides of the lens



Beneath a photo that shows me in midair, leaping into splits, my Playmate pictorial begins with this canny observation: "Anne Marie Fox is eager to get on with the business of being Anne Marie Fox." At 19, my ambition—and my impatience to make my own way in the world—was already apparent to my interviewer. Looking back, it's clear to me that PLAYBOY captured a turning point in my life. Although I didn't realize it at the time, my first experience in front of the camera catalyzed what would become my passion for working behind it.

• • •

When I was 11, I moved with my mother to West Germany, where I attended *Gymnasium*—an academics-focused secondary school. The German educators were just as strict as the Catholic nuns I was used to, but my time in West Germany was formative. I absorbed and adopted valuable aspects of the culture; discipline and a strict work ethic still shape my daily habits. Without my exposure to European culture, I doubt I would be as open-minded and liberal-thinking as I am today. Travel is truly the best educator.

It was while I was abroad that I discovered my first PLAYBOY, hidden in my German-language tutor's bathroom. I remember thinking, I wish I had a body beautiful enough to be in PLAYBOY one day. Seven years later, after I had moved back to the States, my adolescent desire came true.

I was a freshman at Mount Saint Mary's College in Los Angeles when I agreed one day to go shopping with my roommate, who drove us out to Sunset Boulevard. Her parallel-parking skills were iffy at best, so I stepped out and guided her into the only available spot. As I remember it, when we went to cross the street, a friendly young man approached us and asked if we would be interested in meeting with his boss—PLAYBOY's photo editor. We had happened to park directly outside her office window. My roommate and I glanced at each other, assuming it must be some sort of joke, then agreed to check it out as a dare. I expected the photo editor to be interested in my beautiful roommate, so it was a shock when she asked if I would consider posing. Playing along, I said, "Sure, why not?" "Fantastic!" she replied, then led me through the corridors into a massive, sun-drenched photo studio. The next day I received a call at my dorm informing me that Hugh Hefner had approved

This page and inset: *"I was photographed on the grounds of the Playboy Mansion, on the tennis court," Fox says. "Tennis was and still is my favorite sport, so I'm particularly fond of these semi-nude yet remarkably wholesome images."*

This page: *"This photo of me is a favorite. It actually exudes some palpable sensuality—it's hard for me to say that without laughing a bit."* ***Opening spread and opposite page:*** *Outtakes from Fox's Playmate shoot. "I received boxloads of fan mail from all over the world and did my best to respond to every letter. The fan mail still trickles in."*



my Polaroid; I could begin the Playmate shoot as soon as my semester ended.

• • •

My experience on set was incredible. I was treated so well—even spoiled a bit—and felt I was working in a creative environment with consummate professionals. Each day afforded me new insights on photography, lighting, production design, hair and makeup, and my own physicality. Modeling for PLAYBOY was my first opportunity to experience both sides of the camera. I began to understand the symbiosis between subject and photographer.

The reality of being a Playmate didn't actually sink in until I saw my published pictorial for the first time. En route to a Playboy event, I picked up the magazine at an airport newsstand. As I flipped through the pages, I became distracted by a group of Japanese businessmen enthusiastically doing the very same. They spotted me and did a double-take at my Centerfold. We all shared a knowing smile.

After my PLAYBOY pictorial came out, I dabbled in fashion modeling and commercial acting. I signed with a few agencies and moved to New York City to enroll at the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting, but unfortunately the climate of the early 1980s was not ideal for African American actresses. The only jobs I managed to secure were mostly for background talent and the occasional television commercial. This was hardly satisfying, so I began rethinking my options as an artist.

After four years honing my acting craft with Stella Adler, I attended Columbia University, majoring in English literature and minoring in film studies. Post-graduation, I applied to the International Center of Photography and was accepted. I apprenticed under the legendary Brigitte Lacombe and Nan Goldin, who equipped me with the technique and self-esteem to pursue photography professionally. Partly thanks to Goldin's encouragement, I came to realize my degrees from Columbia could be parlayed into a fulfilling photography career. This was a huge epiphany! Based on her unwavering support, I relocated to Italy after graduating to work on developing my first portfolio.

A few years later, I received an offer to head to London and be a photographer on the set of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,* directed by and co-starring Kenneth Branagh. My job was to capture the daily intensive prosthetics transformation of the lead actor, Robert De Niro, whose metamorphosis from man into the monster was fascinating to witness and to photograph. As his character evolved, so did the prosthetics—an extra scar here, a wooden limb there. It was my first foray into set photography, and I found every aspect of the work energizing. I remember as I stood gaping at the scale and authenticity of this period piece, a distinct sensation washed over me. I was finally in my happy place: a creative environment surrounded by screenwriters, acclaimed actors and an über-talented director, all of whom I genuinely respected and admired, and me, camera in hand, given free rein to document this fleeting endeavor.

• • •

I still have specific career goals as a photographer that, hopefully, are not beyond my reach, and I can also envision myself writing and directing. But after more than 20 years in the industry, my larger dream has become to uplift and inspire others through my work. Each assignment still feels so visceral; each project takes up a sacred space within my subconscious. I want to establish myself as a dedicated image maker, storyteller and role model for all women and especially women of color. As much as my life has changed since becoming a Playmate, I continue to evolve as an artist. I'll always be eager to get on with the business of being me.









*My **happy** place: a creative environment **surrounded** by people I respect and **admire.***



Opposite page, top left: *"I was practicing my jumping splits poolside, and Phillip Dixon managed to capture me in midair. He was a wonderful photographer; he took almost all my pictorial photos. I'll admit I always had a little crush on Phillip."* ***This page, following page and remaining photos opposite page:*** *More outtakes from Fox's Playmate shoot. "My interest in photography played a crucial part in my decision to explore working as a model. I've always had a keen interest in classical painting and the nude figure as well, so when the opportunity to become a nude model presented itself as serendipitously as it did, it was a no-brainer to pose for* PLAYBOY."



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PLAYBOY CLUB
LONDON



CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 1972

Civil rights legends (from left) T.R.M. Howard, Thomas Todd, Jesse Jackson and Cecil Hale attend a PUSH event at the original Playboy Mansion. Jackson founded PUSH, or People United to Serve Humanity, in 1971.









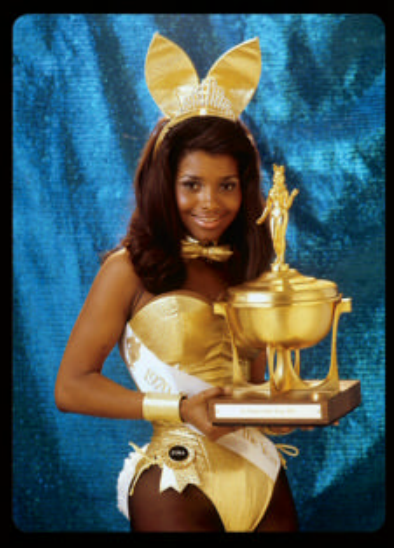
















CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR

LOVE WATTS **ORVILLE PECK** KATIE HILL

DIANE GUERRERO **PRINCESS NOKIA**

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